The ONCE and FUTURE CHURCH

Christian Initiation
And Your Parish

Barbara O'Dea, D.W.

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The Once and Future Church

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The Once and Future Church

Barbara O'Dea, D.W.

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To my family
who have shaped my faith
and
to the friends
who have accompanied me
on my journey

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Forward

Pope John XXIII, it is said, was once asked how many people work at the Vatican. With a smile on his face and an impish glint in his eye, he is reported to have replied: "Oh, I suppose, about half." I am wondering what Pope John would have responded had the questioner asked him, "How many Catholics really work at being Roman Catholic Christians?" I am sure he would have had his answer to that question.

I do not have an answer; I only know that all of us are to some degree a part of the problem. I can assure you, though, that you will receive good insights into the question from Barbara O'Dea's excellent little book, *The Once and Future Church.*

I am grateful that during these latter years I have become acquainted with the new *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). Its importance and its potential are far greater than I had initially realized. When I first heard of the RCIA, I thought of it in terms of ritual, a new way of baptizing adults; or I thought of it as a new, longer, and perhaps better way of preparing people for baptism through special catechesis. Experience has taught me that the RCIA means much more than that.

I can thank John Costanzo and Barbara O'Dea for my conversion. When John Costanzo was Director of Catholic Education for the Diocese of Pueblo, he caught the vision of church the RCIA affords. He gathered a few people together to share his vision. With them he laid the groundwork for the implementation of the RCIA in the diocese. Barbara O'Dea came to Pueblo filled with enthusiasm for the RCIA for what it can do to make the church come alive in the spirit of Vatican II. She brought with her persuasive powers to enlist

others to the cause and practical ideas for the implementation of the rite.

Meanwhile, John Costanzo had become a pastor in Alamosa, Colorado. With his staff and with the help of his parishioners, he developed a very active catechumenate in Sacred Heart parish there. Through Barbara O'Dea's leadership and Rosemarie Greco's catechetical expertise, a city-wide interparish catechumenate was organized in Pueblo, staffed by team members from participating parishes. I became involved personally in these catechumenates. I was able to realize from firsthand experience the rite's power to form enthusiastic Christians as they prepare for baptism and initiation into the community of believers. I saw the rite as an effective means of renewal for an entire parish or cluster of parishes.

I had participated in the four sessions of Vatican II. I was deeply impressed and greatly moved by the emphasis placed on church: the church, the light of the nations; the church, people of God; the mystery of the church. I was delighted at the thrust of the church in the modern world. I had been brought up with one concept of church: a static and highly organizational model. What I was hearing on the council floor, and what I was reading in the council documents concerned a vastly different model: a dynamic church, a church in which the Holy Spirit gave charisms for ministry to lay people as well as to clerics; a church where all are called to holiness; a church where everyone is called to serve.

I had to admit to some wonder and concern: how could the bishops of the church collaborate with the Holy Spirit in transforming the church from the model I knew to the model the church is called to become? Even now, the answer to that question is not fully apparent. I do know that, if such a transformation is to take place, the work cannot be done by bishops alone. It is a task for everyone.

I do see a great hope in the RCIA. It brings life and vitality to all who open themselves to its Spirit-filled influence. I have seen conversion and holiness come to many.

Barbara O'Dea's *The Once and Future Church* is an important book for anyone who wants to share in the work of church renewal. Pope John XXIII would have recommended it. As one called by him to the episcopacy, I recommend it highly.

Charles A. Buswell
Former Bishop of Pueblo

Introduction

My interest in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) grew out of its pastoral challenge. The Latin edition, *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum,* was published in 1972, and a draft English translation appeared a year later. I began to study the literature on the subject with a view to implementing the rite according to the plan I had used for other renewed rites in my role as Coordinator of Liturgy for the diocese of Richmond, Virginia.

The plan included three steps:

1. First Year—clergy inservice. Whenever a new rite appeared, the Department of Religious Education and Liturgy organized a study day for the diocesan priests on the rite, its genesis and its implementation. We distributed a bibliography for further study. Because two years elapsed between the original document and its ICEL translation, pastors had ample time to become familiar with the new rite and plan its implementation.

2. Second Year—inservice for parish staff members and liturgy committees. Directors of Religious Education, pastoral ministers and committee members were offered workshops on the renewed rite. We wanted them to develop a parish catechesis and to plan the rite's implementation on the local level.

3. Third year—parish catechesis and implementation. According to this plan the parishes of the diocese were ordinarily ready for implementation when the new rite became available in its official English translation.

In the case of RCIA, the task appeared overwhelming. After personal study and participation in the conference on Christian initiation and the catechumenate at the Murphy Center for Liturgical Research, Notre Dame (1974), I began step one of the process. I soon

saw this was not just another rite, nor simply a complex process. This rite was based on a renewed ecclesiology, and it assumed that local churches seeking to implement it had in fact integrated the conciliar ecclesiology into parish life. In my experience that simply was not true, not even in churches where pastoral leaders and people had been seriously involved in parish renewal over a period of years. This insight led me to further study, not only of the literature, but of the experience of the small number of parishes across the country involved in the implementation of the RCIA.

Based on this experience, I thought it valuable to make explicit what is implicit in the RCIA, namely, the vision of church on which the catechumenal process and its liturgical moments are based. This essay in pastoral theology hopes to promote an understanding of the kind of ecclesial milieu in which catechumenates can flourish and to give a sense of direction to the long range planning of renewal in local churches.

To do this, I had to delve into history: the story of the development of the catechumenate in the early church and its revival in our time. Vatican II is a turning point because it explicitly encouraged catechumenates and, more importantly, it offered a renewed vision of church. Finally, I conclude with a study of the rite's ecclesiology and I suggest an approach for local churches to make the vision real.

I want to acknowledge my gratitude to Jake Empereur, S.J., Doug Adams and Michael Cooke, S.J., for their criticisms and suggestions concerning this manuscript. I especially thank Roger Yaworski, S.J., for his assistance in orienting me to the materials; to Rosemarie Greco, D.W., whose patient reading, active support and organizational talent were of invaluable assistance; and to Rev. Ron Schmit and the members of the Christian Initiation Commission of the diocese of Pueblo for the materials on the three year implementation plan used in the diocese.

Barbara O'Dea, D.W.

Pueblo, Colorado
May, 1980

1

Roots

How it all began

"There is no catechumenate without the church," writes Michael Dujarier, "for Christian initiation exists only in, by and for the church. Likewise, there is no church without catechumenal initiation, for the church is a mother perpetually giving birth."[1]

To understand the vision of church in our current *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,* we must both return to our historical roots and be immersed in contemporary reality. If Christians are indeed made, not born, then a survey of Christian formation at various stages in church history will reveal key aspects of that ecclesial self-understanding the church transmits through catechumenal education.

In this chapter we shall look at five eras in the church practice of initiation of new members: the New Testament period, the periods of early development, decline, missionary renewal and contemporary development.

New Testament period

"Go, make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19). This text of the Lord's great commission clearly indicates not only the mission of the disciple-community, but also its stages. The task was first to make disciples (evangelization), only then to baptize them (sacramental initiation into the mystery of the church) and finally, to continue their formation through teaching.

[1] Michel Dujarier, "A Survey of the History of the Catechumenate," in *Becoming a Catholic Christian, A Symposium on Christian Initiation* (New York: Sadlier, 1978), p. 8.

Ministries developed from this initial understanding. For example, Paul clearly understood his mission as apostle in terms of evangelization, of "making disciples." In his letter to the Corinthians he states: "I baptized none of you except Chrispus and Gaius. . . . Oh, and I baptized the household of Stephanus. Beyond that I am not aware of having baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:14, 16-17).

The Acts of the Apostles contain numerous accounts of the manner in which the good news was preached and new members were received into the community. At first glance this direct, uncomplicated approach to the mission of "making disciples" could be misleading. Were there no norms other than the simple desire for baptism? Was due consideration given to the time necessary for true conversion? Were there basic criteria by which the community assessed the candidate's readiness for baptism?[2]

The story of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48) gives us some interesting insights into the process of admitting new members into the church toward the end of the first century. The account unfolds in two parallel conversations, the first between Peter and Cornelius' servants, the second between Peter and Cornelius. Evidently the writer of Acts considered this encounter with the first gentile converts worthy of emphasis because he takes pains to describe in detail their admission to the community. Cornelius, a centurion "who was religious and god-fearing" (v. 1), perhaps a Jewish proselyte, had a vision of a messenger from God. As a result he sends for Peter. Thus begins the process: Cornelius expresses desire for evangelization to a recognized church leader.

His servants, having arrived at the place where Peter was staying inquire after him (v. 17).

Cornelius himself, waiting expectantly, gathers his relatives and friends to hear Peter. On his arrival Cornelius receives him with signs of deep respect (vv. 24-25).

Peter asks the church's traditional question:

"I am the one you are looking for. What brought you here?" (v. 21).

"I should, of course, like to know why you summoned me" (v. 29).

[2] For an extensive treatment of the New Testament period, see André Laurentin and Michel Dujarier, *Catéchuménat: Données de l'Histoire et Perspectives Nouvelles* (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1969).

The candidate (or his/her representatives) responds:

"The centurion Cornelius has been instructed by a messenger to summon you to his house. There he is to hear what you have to say" (v. 22).

"Just three days ago at this very hour, namely three o'clock, I was praying at home when a man in dazzling robes stood before me. 'Cornelius,' he said, 'send someone to Joppa to invite Simon known as Peter to come here.' I sent for you immediately and you have been kind enough to come" (vv. 30-33a).

The candidate (or his/her representatives) requests to hear the gospel:

"Cornelius is at his house to hear what you have to say" (v. 22).

"All of us stand before God at this moment to hear whatever directives the Lord has given you" (v. 33b).

Witnesses testify in favor of the candidate's request:

The messenger of God attests: "Your prayers and your generosity have risen in God's sight and because of them he has remembered you" (vv. 4, 31).

The three envoys and the Jewish community bear witness: "The centurion Cornelius who is an upright and God-fearing man, well thought of by the whole Jewish community" (v. 22).

The candidate is then invited to cross the threshold, to enter the house:

With that Peter invited him in and treated them as guests (v. 23).

Peter then went in talking with him all the while (v. 27).

Peter presents the good news, the catechesis (vv. 34-43), including the basic kerygma (v. 37-41), the commission to the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection to preach (v. 42), the call to faith and conversion (v. 43).

The climax of the process was baptism. In this case, the first

gentile household to profess faith in Christ, God first sends his Spirit on the "catechumens." In light of this manifestation of the Lord's will, Peter asks: "What can stop these people who have received the Holy Spirit, even as we have, from being baptized with water?" (v. 47). The community representatives accept the new believers and admit them to baptism.

I stress this example of church practice in apostolic times because the structure, rooted in the Jewish tradition of proselyte baptism and manifested in the practice of contemporary groups like the Essenes at Qumran, remained the basic framework of Christian initiation during the following centuries.

Ensuing generations would develop the stages already reflected in the Cornelius story. Inquirers sought out community members who provided informal, initial instruction. Those desiring to become catechumens then requested entrance into the church. The local community leader, after listening to the testimony of witnesses and questioning the inquirers on their motives, received them as catechumens.

Candidates were initiated into the Christian mysteries through baptism in Christ and sealing with the Spirit. While the terminology reflects the language of a later period, the structure already existed in apostolic times. The seeds would come to maturity over a period of 200 years.

Development of the catechumenate

Jerusalem's destruction (70 A.D.) completely uprooted the church from Jewish soil. For the young church dispersed throughout Asia Minor, Greece and even Rome new challenges arose. Converts were no longer steeped in the scriptures and traditions familiar to the church at Jerusalem. Christian communities were now far removed from Judaism's institutions and community structures.

Toward the end of the first century a new consideration contributed to the church's vision of its mission. Gradually, Christian communities came to realize that the parousia was not so imminent as originally thought. They had to prepare themselves for an unforeseeable future.

In addition, the church was in a precarious situation until the fourth century. Christians were too few in number. Socially, the milieu in which they lived was pagan. Politically, they were subjected to waves of persecution. Popularly, they were the victims of mob

violence, police measures and literary polemics. As a community with a mission to the world in which it was immersed, the church was sensitive to the judgments pronounced upon it. Externally, the enemies Christians had to overcome were prejudice and misinformation. As a result, internally, there was great concern that conversion be authentic. Christ's saving power could neither be manifest nor effective where faith was weak.

Consequently, a living tradition of great vitality was a hallmark of the early church. Within little more than a century the church moved from that simple reception of new members found in Acts to the ecclesial structure of the catechumenate. The community's sensitivity to the world around it caused creative innovations in the catechumenal process. The second century church in both East and West realized that, after acceptance of the kerygma, inquirers needed a longer period of instruction and maturation in the faith. Only time would permit the new believer to change his life and integrate gospel values. While there was pluralism in the initiatory process in the various local churches, the underlying structures were parallel. Stenzel notes, "What is astounding is the extent to which the church was always ready to adapt herself by shifting the emphasis, by fresh combinations of traditional elements, by an unequivocal renunciation of what had become superfluous and unusable."[3]

Let us take a brief look at the developing process of incorporating new members by the church at Rome. Justin's *First Apology* (nos. 61-67) synthesizes the practice of the Roman church around 150 A.D.: "How we dedicated ourselves to God when we were made new through Christ I will explain. . . . Those who are persuaded and believe that the things we teach and say are true, and promise that they can live accordingly are instructed to pray and beseech God with fasting for the remission of past sins, while we pray and fast along with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water and are reborn by the same manner of rebirth by which we ourselves were reborn, for they are then washed in the water with the name of God the Father and Master of all, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit."[4]

The environment in which the conversion unfolded should interest the contemporary church. Proclaiming the good news was the

[3] Alois Stenzel, S.J., "Temporal and Supra-Temporal in the History of the Catechumenate and Baptism," *Adult Baptism and the Catechumenate,* Concilium, Vol. 22 (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), p. 32.

[4] Cyril G. Richardson, "First Apology of Justin," *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 282.

mission of all Christians. This evangelization by peers was simple and direct. The instruction which followed was in-depth. The ministry of teaching referred to in New Testament writings (Acts 13:1, Corinthians 12:28ff, Hebrews 6:1) was an integral part of the community's life. Some Christians devoted themselves full time to this ministry and founded schools for catechesis. Later these schools came under the hierarchy's supervision. However, the actual work of evangelization and catechesis of converts remained the laity's responsibility.[5]

The criteria for admission to baptism were those indicated by Justin: sorrow for sin (conversion), faith in church teachings and the witness of a life lived according to Christ's teachings. After the period of formation, the local church judged the candidates' readiness for baptism. The celebration of baptism was preceded by a period of community fasting.[6] The initiation of the newly baptized was completed by their participation in the eucharistic meal.[7]

We can easily see the organic development of initiation from the Cornelius story to Justin's account. The establishment of an ecclesial catechumenate was a natural step. "The catechumenate," says Grant, "represents the formalization of what existed informally from a very early time in the history of the church."[8]

In the early third century book of church order, *The Apostolic Tradition,* the author Hippolytus describes the catechumenate in Rome. He treats criteria of admission to the catechumenate, the catechetical period proper, and the reception of baptism.

Newcomers to the faith were to be brought to the teachers and questioned about their reason for coming to the faith,[9] their state of life and manner of living[10] and their crafts or professions.[11] Those accepted were expected to live a Christian way of life from the beginning. They were dismissed if unwilling to follow the community's high moral standards not only in their private lives, but also in their manner of earning a livelihood. Special stress was placed

[5] Laurentin and Dujarier, p. 40.

[6] Richardson, no. 61, p. 282.

[7] Ibid., nos. 65-66, pp. 285-286.

[8] Robert Grant, "Development of the Christian Catechumenate," in *Made Not Born.* Murphy Center for Liturgical Research (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), P. 39.

[9] Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), no. 16-2, p. 23.

[10] Ibid., no. 16-3, p. 23.

[11] Ibid., no. 16-9, p. 24.

upon marital fidelity and the abandonment of work contrary to Christian customs, namely, those which involved idolatry, murder or impurity. Brothel keepers, sculptors, artists, actors, teachers, those who performed in the circus or gladitorial combats, all whose trades were culturally tied to idolatry, as well as soldiers and military governors who had power over life and death had to resign or be rejected.

The catechumens' instruction usually lasted three years.[12] After formal catechesis by the teacher, they spent a period in private prayer.[13] The catechist then laid hands on them, prayed over them and dismissed them. Hippolytus clearly states that teachers, both cleric and lay, should proceed in this manner.[14]

During a subsequent examination sponsors witnessed to the catechumens' conduct and good works during their instruction.[15] Those judged ready were set apart "to hear the gospel," i.e., to prepare for baptism.[16] The period of immediate preparation seems to have been a kind of pre-baptismal retreat lasting one week with daily exorcisms accompanied by a laying on of hands. On Thursday those chosen were instructed to bathe. Friday and Saturday were days of fast. Finally, the vigil ended at dawn on Sunday with baptism and the celebration of the eucharist.[17] Hippolytus concludes by describing the liturgical celebration.[18]

The third century represents the highpoint in the development of catechumenal praxis in the church. Several points are noteworthy. The church was flourishing at this time in a hostile environment. Admission to its ranks was neither available on demand nor an automatic conclusion to the catechumenal journey. The examination before admission to the catechumenate concerned primarily the candidate's moral life and understanding of the basic teaching. The examination prior to baptism tested the person's knowledge of the faith and growth in a Christian way of life.

Although Hippolytus does not specify it, other contemporary writers give evidence of a period of post-baptismal catechesis. The neophytes first experienced the mysteries of faith, then received an explanation. This experiential learning characterized sacramental

[12] Ibid., no. 17-1, p. 28.
[13] Ibid., no. 18-1, p. 29.
[14] Ibid., no. 19-1, p. 30.
[15] Ibid., no. 20-1, p. 30.
[16] Ibid., no. 20-2, p. 31.
[17] Ibid., nos. 20-3 to 20-10, pp. 31-32.
[18] Ibid., nos. 21 to 23, pp. 33-43.

catechesis through the following centuries as evidenced in the mystagogical writings of Ambrose, Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom.[19]

The status of the church vis-a-vis the surrounding culture gradually changed. The Edict of Milan issued by Constantine in 313 A.D. marked the first time in its history that Chrisianity was officially tolerated by the Roman Empire. Little by little this state of tolerance spread throughout the empire. Eventually Constantine himself became a Christian. Christianity became the privileged religion in the Roman world. Within a short time people from all social classes moved to Christianity. The church by that very fact entered into a closer relationship with the secular sector and the culture of pagan antiquity.

Initially, the fourth century church continued the development of the preceding era. Of course, the persecutions that had brought internal cohesiveness as a social and religious group were no longer active. The church had now to adjust to an entirely new situation.

Decline of the catechumenal discipline

Pagan temples were converted into Christian basilicas and wealthy Christians felt privileged to build large churches worthy of the worship of God. Throngs sought membership in numbers too great for the disciple-communities to absorb. It was no longer possible to scrutinize carefully each individual's motives. Becoming a Christian was a way to curry favor with the emperor, an asset to social climbers. The church's failure to maintain its high standards for entrance into the catechumenate seems in the light of history to have been a fatal error. Some who became catechumens for social or political reasons had no desire for conversion or full incorporation into the Christian mysteries. They soon abandoned catechesis, remained perpetual catechumens, continued their former way of life, yet were known as Christians. As a result, the quality of Christian witness waned.

On the positive side, many bishops took seriously their role as

[19] DuCharlat and Danielou, *La Catechèse aux Premiers Siècles* (Paris: Fayard-Mame, 1968), pp. 183-224. The authors analyze the mystagogical instructions of Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ambrose of Milan under the headings "Commentary on the Rites" and "Sacramental Typology." See also Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation*, Studies in Christian Antiquity, vol. 17, Johannes Quasten, editor (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, Consortium Press, 1974); the volume is a comparative study of the mystagogical writings of Cyril, Theodore, Ambrose and John Chrysostom.

teachers. Catechetically, the fourth and fifth centuries were the golden age of the great Fathers of the church: Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen in the East, Ambrose and Augustine in the West. Liturgically, the rites of Christian initiation celebrated annually in the churches, climaxing at the Easter vigil, provided the symbolic vehicle wherein the whole church, catechumens and faithful, experienced the Christian mysteries. The rites both effected and celebrated the new meaning of life, of relation to God, the church and the world. Because it was an age where the language of symbol was understood and catechesis flourished, the rites of Christian initiation returned the neophytes to everyday life with a new and profound sense of its meaning and their mission within it.

Nonetheless, the catechumenal institution was declining. The church once again adapted to meet the changed situation. An extended Lenten period, intended as a mini-catechumenate to compensate for the lack of prolonged catechumenal formation, was inaugurated. The Lenten liturgies telescoped the rites formerly celebrated throughout the catechumenate. Though brief, the preparation was serious and intense. After the celebration of the paschal mystery during Holy Week, sacramental catechesis was provided during the Easter octave.

In the long haul the ecclesial problems of the era won the day. The reasons are numerous and complex. Infant baptism is blamed most often in our contemporary debate on Christian initiation. Indeed by the sixth century infant baptism was standard church practice. Ancient baptismal discipline was modified in the changed situation. However, the practice of infant baptism was not fully responsible for the dismemberment of the rite of initiation or for the decline of the catechumenal structure.

Over the years the quality of adult catechesis had deteriorated markedly. Moreover, the problem of numbers diminished the sense of community and cohesiveness in the local church. A weaker understanding of Christian identity and church mission was the result. Simultaneously, an increasing number of clerics assumed responsibility for ministries formerly filled by lay persons. Adult Christians began to see themselves as "children" of holy mother church.

Liturgically, the church in the West had early reserved to the bishop the role of the post-baptismal chrismation. This rite had come to be associated with the gift of the Spirit. Along with the

Augustinian concept of original sin and the practice of infant baptism, this development contributed mightily to the dismemberment of the initiation rite. Gradually, baptism became associated less with the Easter celebration of the paschal mystery and more with birth. Christian parents, formerly content to enroll their offspring in the catechumenate, now looked to an early baptism lest children die in a state of original sin. The popular understanding of the paschal meaning of initiation blurred and the experience of the rite's unity disappeared with the reservation of the post-baptismal signing to the bishop. It was a short step to the disintegration of the rite into two separate sacraments, baptism and confirmation, with two separate sets of effects. Both sacraments were further dissociated from incorporation into the eucharistic community.

In the anomalous situation that prevailed, pre-baptismal rites intended as separate from the sacrament and spread over a period of time were telescoped into a single event. The rites integral to sacramental initiation, i.e., confirmation and eucharist, were so effectively severed from the event that for centuries most Christians were not aware of any previous historical or theological connection.

The barbarian invasions of Europe beginning in the sixth century further confused the situation; the already tottering Roman empire finally fell and was effectively dismembered. Contact was broken with classical antiquity and the rich Christian heritage of past centuries. Beyond the monastic setting schools declined. Travel was reduced. Historical records were largely destroyed or lost. The era truly merited its title, the dark ages.

Medieval theologians lacked adequate historical sources, and developed sacramental theologies based on the current rituals, thereby justifying the practices of their contemporary church. Even Thomas Aquinas depended for proofs on collections of spurious papal and conciliar materials. He cites as authorities "Melchiades papa," "Eusebius papa" and "Urbanus papa," three non-existent popes.[20] Further, in working out separate theologies of baptism and confirmation, Thomas developed the concept of baptism as the sacrament of spiritual childhood and confirmation as that of spiritual maturity.[21] Thomas himself did not see maturity as a reality achieved over an extended period of time, but as an effect of the transforming power of grace; later theologians developed a chronological

[20] Nathan Mitchell, "Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation," *Made Not Born*, p. 67.

[21] Ibid., p. 68.

understanding of Christian maturation. Our current questions about the appropriate age for confirmation are a legacy of this theology.

Missionary renewal

During the Reformation Europe's fragmented churches were preoccupied with internal affairs and polemics against each other. A defense attitude rather than a mission mentality prevailed in the Roman Catholic communion where, as in other European Christian churches, the adult catechumenate was indeed dead.[22]

But signs of revived interest in the catechumenate came in other sectors. This was the age of the great missionary ventures to Asia, the new world and Africa. Once again the church confronted a world untouched by the Christian message and often hostile to it. Initially, where possible, the tendency was mass baptisms. In Latin America alone the Franciscans baptized thousands of Indians. And in India Francis Xavier in his early ministry practiced indiscriminate baptism.[23] Others were quick to signal the danger in this situation. As early as 1534 the Dominicans and Augustinians labored to correct the problem in Latin America. The former requested that baptisms be celebrated only four times a year: Easter, Pentecost, the feast of St. Augustine and Epiphany. Four years later an episcopal synod required the restoration of a 40-day catechumenate including prayer, fasting, catechesis, exorcisms and scrutinies.

A directive for reform in India came in a letter of Ignatius Loyola written in 1552. He encouraged the establishment of communities where catechumens would come together for a three-month preparation for baptism. Once again the catechumenal structure sprang from the pastoral situation.

In Rome and France others began to awaken interest in the catechumenate ancient and modern. Cardinal Sanctorius undertook an extensive study of ancient liturgies, and in 1602 he published his *Restored Roman Ritual Based on the Practice of the Ancient Church,* an initiation rite that included the restoration of the ancient catechumenate. It was never promulgated. When the *Ritual of Paul V* appeared in 1614, Cardinal Sanctorius' seven stage rite was included, but not as a separate rite to be celebrated over an extended period.

[22] For an overview of the state of the question in the Reformation churches, see Leonel L. Mitchell, "Christian Initiation: the Reformation Period," *Made Not Born,* pp. 83-97.

[23] Much of the information about this period is based on Dujarier, pp. 15-17.

Rather, once again the rites had been compressed into a single celebration based on the current practice.

The Carmelite Thomas of Jesus built on Sanctorius' work. In 1613 at Anvers he published *The Manner of Procuring Salvation for All Pagans,* in which he treated the organization of the catechumenate, offered suggestions for catechesis, and promoted the restoration of the ancient discipline. The Propagation of the Faith (1622) distributed copies of the book to all missionaries departing for Asia. Later (1665), apostolic vicars sent to Asia based their pastoral directives on this work. Meanwhile, the *Missions Etrangeres* of Paris began issuing directives for a catechumenal initiation.

Renewed interest in the restoration of adequate preparation for adult baptisms reached Africa in the 18th century through the work of the Capuchins and the Holy Ghost missionaries. Later Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the White Fathers, restored catechumenal discipline with an emphasis on conversion and on a preparation in stages over an extended period. He inaugurated a catechetical system which took into consideration the stages of growth in faith. He forbade baptizing those who did not give serious evidence of perseverance in the living of their faith during the catechumenal period. His principles influenced other missionary congregations. The eventual restoration of the catechumenate owes much to his efforts.[24]

Unfortunately, the liturgical dimension was seriously lacking in these mission developments. In accord with the piety of the day catechumens were given medals, rosary beads, crucifixes and other objects of devotion rather than the rich liturgical symbolism of Christian initiation. Only inspired historical and pastoral research undertaken in Europe would revitalize and integrate the liturgical moments into the journey of faith.

Contemporary developments

In Europe the rediscovery of the catechumenate was rooted in the French experience.[25] In France during the '30s a burgeoning

[24] Laurentin and Dujarier, p. 22.

[25] The American church would profit from reflection on the French experience. Despite major differences in culture and ecclesiastical history, the similarities are significant. Unlike its mission counterparts, the church in France was an established institution primarily interested in guarding the fold. Neither evangelism nor mission to the world were part of its pre-World War II vision. The parallels are obvious, and we should watch further developments in France as we implement the RCIA in this country.

missionary thrust looked not just to the conversion of individual adults, but to the re-Christianization of society.

In 1943 Godin and David published their book on the French pastoral situation, *France, pays de mission?* and let the skeleton out of the closet. Cultural Christianity was dying, if not already dead. They advocated a fresh new missionary approach to the masses within the eldest daughter of the church.

In 1950 a group of religious in Lyons, dissatisfied with the current method of instructing converts, sought a more coherent approach. A result of their search was a formal discussion of the catechumenate from which a new approach emerged: "The preparation of adults for baptism cannot be made properly if it is restricted to teaching. It is necessary that the teaching be accompanied by insertion into ecclesial life and by participation in liturgy."[26]

The twofold emphasis in this germinal statement has remained a constant principle in the French development of catechumenates over the past quarter of a century: (1) an apostolic concern—catechesis is not only a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ, but also relates to the growth of the church; (2) a specific ecclesial concern which gradually came into sharper focus, "a preoccupation with a church of men and women wanting to live the gospel with the real feelings and commitments that constitute their lives."[27]

The catechumenate received official approval for the first time in the diocese of Lyons in an instruction published in *Semaine Religieuse* on November 6, 1953. Gradually, other dioceses in France followed suit. The movement received further impetus with the issuance of a decree by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on April 16, 1962. The decree authorized bishops to provide for the celebration of initiation in seven stages spread over a period of time following the 1614 prescriptions. Thanks to the decree, synchronization between the stages of growth in faith and its ritualization by the church could become a reality.[28] This document focused the attention of the

[26] "Vers un Catechumenat d'Adultes," *Documentation Catéchétiques* (later named *Catéchèse*), 37 (July 1957): 130, quoted in Henri Bourgeois, "The Catechumenate in France Today," *Becoming a Catholic Christian*, p. 22.

[27] Bourgeois, p. 34.

[28] This reform had the merit of reintegrating the rites preparatory to baptism into their appropriate times in the process of conversion and catechesis. The rite was a milestone in baptismal reform, but its use proved too complex and at times internally incoherent. The need soon became evident for a more sweeping reform of Christian initiation. For a critique of the rite, see Thierry Maertens, *Histoire et Pastorale du Rituale*, pp. 312-318.

French bishops on the catechumenate. In a joint directive to their church, they stated their consciousness of being "responsible for the celebration of adult baptism and concerned to supervise the preparation of every adult catechumen for the sacraments of Christian initiation (baptism, confirmation and eucharist), in conformity with the tradition of the church."[29]

In 1964 the National Service of the Catechumenate was established in Paris to foster communication among catechumenal centers around the country, to establish contact with catechumenates abroad and to promote research and development. In 1966 the National Service began publication of the journal *Catéchuménat-Reflexion* which later became the periodical *Croissance de l'Eglise* (1970).[30]

After initial success came growing pains. The problem of the relationship between catechumenal centers and the local parishes became evident, not theoretically but existentially. Newly baptized adults could not easily enter parish life as it existed. The rate of perseverance was poor. Was it because catechumenal centers had done a poor job of introducing catechumens to the larger church? Or were the parishes really not capable of assimilating new members?

In 1969 the first National Conference of the Catechumenate in France faced the questions: Should the catechumenate orient the catechumens and newly baptized to the local church? Or should it give birth to the church around them and with them?[31]

Surprisingly, the 350 delegates chose the second alternative. The reasons for their choice apply to a remarkable extent to the state of affairs in many American parishes today.[32]

This conference's position statement represents a clear change in orientation. The catechumenates opted for smaller local communities. The result was a loss of both visibility and credibility in the larger, more institutional church.

A different problem faced those responsible for the development of the catechumenate. After 1968 the number of catechumens decreased. Morever, they no longer came from a non-believing socio-cultural context. As a consequence the church was losing contact with these groups.

[29] Quoted in Bernard Guillard, "Evangelization and the Catechumenate in France," *Adult Baptism and the Catechumenate*, p. 152.

[30] Bourgeois, p. 25.

[31] Ibid., p. 26. These points raise questions about the vision and vitality of the church in the local parish which the American church has yet to face.

[32] Ibid., pp. 26-27.

The second National Conference of the French Catechumenate in 1973 tried to respond to this problem. The delegates chose a two-pronged approach: continue the mission of welcoming those requesting Christian initiation, reach out to people in the settings in which they were searching and questioning.[33]

Development in the following years consisted primarily in refocusing on conversion in terms of personal transformation, identification with fellow believers and participation in the church's mission. Moreover, the components of the catechumenal process were redefined: respect for the time factor and the freedom of each candidate and each group, explicit announcement of God's word, integration into the Christian community and, finally, attention to the candidate's background (socio-cultural, economic, etc.).[34]

More recently (November, 1977), the Third National Conference of the Catechumenate treated the question: "The Catechumenate, the Future of the Church?" Ecclesial and cultural concerns were again emphasized. Those involved in the catechumenal ministry see as priorities the need to "restore the ecclesial fabric," i.e., to create models where sharing and communication can occur, to restate the faith in new language based on the experience and expression of those currently engaged in the search for God.[35]

History shows us a continuing interaction between the church and the world in which it is immersed. In eras when the world's identity and values differed recognizably from the church's, a creative tension and a dynamic dialogue ensued. In the age of Christendom the lines of demarcation were blurred, and the quality of Christian life and sense of mission suffered. A restored sense of mission came with the renewed experience of "making disciples" in the missions and honest confrontation of the fact that, in spite of cultural vestiges, the church in Europe was indeed missionary territory.

[33] Ibid., p. 29.
[34] Ibid., p. 31.
[35] Ibid., p. 33.

2

Awakening

Restoring a vision

"At a time when Vatican II had just commenced its preparatory work," comments Aubry, "there already existed . . . the international work of catechumenal, ecumenical and liturgical teams . . . . Many years of work in two hemispheres enriched their experience and matured their reflection. . . . Their articles and books, even before inspiring the conciliar documents, furnished the theological framework of a strong pastoral movement which the Council consequently had (only) to canonize."[1]

Vatican II was, of course, far more than a gathering to "crown and canonize" even the best in pastoral developments. John XXIII summoned it to be an "extraordinary Epiphany" and a "new Pentecost." His vision contributed significantly to the creation of the council's spirit. A shift in attitude towards both church and world was evident in the opening "Message to Humanity" (October 20, 1962) in which the bishops stated:

"In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ. . . . Since we are shepherds, we desire that all those may have their longing satisfied who seek God. . . . We are pastors (who) devote all our energies and thoughts to the renewal of ourselves and the flocks committed to us, so that there may radiate before all . . . the loveable features

[1] Andre Aubry, "The Pastoral Dimensions of the Rite of Adult Initiation," translated by Lawrence Johnson, in *Christian and Parish Rebirth and Renewal*, study manual for national meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (Pevely, Missouri: F.D.L.C., 1976), p. 16.

of Jesus Christ."[2] This pastoral orientation permeated the council's pronouncements and has left its mark on subsequent developments.

In this chapter I will review Vatican II's ecclesiology and describe the effects of this renewed pastoral and missionary outlook on the praxis of the Christian initiation of adults. In the first section I will present the council's pronouncements on the initiatory process. In the second, I will describe the process in the RCIA with some comments on the rite's meaning and characteristics.

Ecclesial context

Initiation is for the church. The theological foundations and context for the renewed initiation process are found in the vision of the church in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,* in particular, in chapter two on the "People of God." The following chapter will treat this perception of the church in some detail. A subsequent development of conciliar ecclesiology is contained in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,* the source of many significant post-Vatican II developments in ecclesiology.[3]

The new and refreshing element in the conciliar vision of the church is the basic shift in emphasis from a structural to a relational model, dramatically represented in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.* In its original draft that document's first chapter was entitled: "The Nature of the Church Militant." It presented a hierarchical model of the citadel mentality that had prevailed in the Roman church since the Reformation. Protracted discussions and subsequent revisions led to remarkable evolution in the conciliar understanding of the church. In the approved document, the first chapter was entitled: "The Mystery of the Church." The transformation was amazing. At once the vision was lifted above the level of institutional organization to the level of relationship to God, to the community of the faithful and to the world.

The church as mystery[4] is a transcendent reality which a sovereign

[2] Walter M. Abbott, S.J., editor, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), "Message to Humanity," pp. 3-4.

[3] The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes,* GS), promulgated on December 7, 1965, is the only major Vatican II document originated in the Council itself, one of its most significant achievements. The text has profoundly affected the ecclesiology developed since Vatican II. It influences the context of the initiatory process.

[4] Abbott, ed., Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium,* LG), nos. 5a, 39a, 44c, 63a; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (GS), nos. 2a, 40a; Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes,* AG), no. 16c.

God has made present among us for the world's salvation. In its origins the church is divine, it belongs to God, not to us. This concept is closely related to another conciliar image, the church as sacrament. As Christ is the sacrament of the Father, so the church is a sacrament of Christ, a "sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity."[5]

Another major title of the church in the conciliar documents is the biblical image, the people of God. Mystery and sacrament focus primarily on the transcendent present and visible among us; the concept of a new people of God stresses the church's human and communal aspects. The people of the new covenant are called to be a priestly, prophetic and royal community. They respond to this call through their communal worship and witness.[6] Christ founded this new people[7] to be the sacrament of salvation.[8] In him all are intimately bound to each other in one family,[9] God's sons and daughters. Immersed in this world and its history, the people of God are led by the Holy Spirit on their journey to God the Father.[10]

Mystery, sacrament, people of God, family of God, one with him and with each other and called to unity with all people: these are the church's principal marks as described by Vatican II. The stage was set for a re-examination of the mission of evangelization and the process of initiating new members into the church. Ecclesially, the climate was ideal. A church that sees itself primarily as institution teaches dogma; a church that envisions itself as mystery initiates new members into those mysteries. Historically, the setting was more challenging. Reflection on the catechumenate's evolution and decline indicates it flourished in ages when the church's identity and standards were distinct from those of the surrounding religious and cultural milieu. But the Vatican II documents have a strong ecumenical thrust and insist on respect for cultural values in non-Christian milieux. The wisdom of this stance may be admirable, but it remains to be seen if the church is capable of the flexibility needed for a dialogic approach to the world.

In the first conciliar decree to treat initiation, the liturgy document, issued on December 4, 1963, articles 64-71 speak of the

[5] Ibid., LG, no. 1b; see also LG, nos. 9f, 48b; GS, no. 45a; AG, no. 1a.
[6] Ibid., LG, nos. 9-12.
[7] Ibid., LG, nos. 5d, 8d; GS, nos. 3b, 40b, 78a; AG, no. 1a.
[8] Ibid., AG, no. 5b.
[9] Ibid., GS, nos. 32e, 40b; LG, no. 51c.
[10] Ibid., GS, no. 1

reform of the initiation process. The first of these articles provides for the restoration of the catechumenate: "The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be put into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the period of the catechumenate which is intended as a time of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals" (no. 64).

Subsequent articles called for the cultural adaptation of initiation rites (no. 65), revision of the rites of adult initiation (no. 66), the reintegration of confirmation into its original context as part of the initiation process (no. 71).

Other documents gave shape to the vision. The *Decree on the Missions* (AG) called for admission to the catechumenate in the context of a liturgical celebration and defined it in ecclesial terms:

"Those who, through the church, have accepted from God a belief in Christ should be admitted to the catechumenate by liturgical rites. The catechumenate is not a mere expounding of doctrines and precepts, but a training period for the whole Christian life. It is an apprenticeship of appropriate length, during which the disciples are joined to Christ their teacher. Therefore, catechumens should be properly instructed in the mystery of salvation and in the practice of gospel morality. By sacred rites which are to be held at successive intervals, they should be introduced into the life of faith, liturgy, and love, which God's people lives" (no. 14).

In accord with the ecclesial vision of the *Constitution on the Church*, faith in Christ and introduction to Christianity as mystery of salvation and way of life lived by the Christian community were to be the hallmarks of the restored catechumenate. Moreover, the sacraments of initiation were placed in a paschal context with the liturgy of Lent as an immediate preparation. The celebration itself is described as a passover from death to life with Christ and a reception of the Spirit who incorporates the newly baptized into God's people. Together they celebrate the eucharist (AG 14 b, c).

Once again Christian initiation was recognized as the responsibility of the Christian community and in a special way of sponsors. Welcomed and accompanied in their search by believers, the catechumens would grow in their identification with God's people. Further, since the church is essentially apostolic, catechumens were to learn how to actively spread the gospel and build up the church (AG 14 d).

Significantly, these articles on formation of catechumens in a communal context are followed by a section on the formation and corporate vocation of the community. Missionaries are to exhort Christian communities to "walk in a manner worthy of the vocation to which they have been called" (Ephesians 4:1). This priestly, prophetic and royal people will then be a sign of God's presence in the world, a leaven in the culture, proclaimers of the good news and fellow travelers with others on their journey to faith. This vocation is to be exercised not in a competitive manner, but in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation between individuals and churches. Finally, the importance of a variety of ministries to build up the local church and to fulfill its mission to the larger community is underscored (AG 15-17).

While the RCIA represents a development of the Vatican II documents, even a cursory reading of the introduction reveals the profound influence of the vision contained in the *Decree on the Missions* on the RCIA and through it on the entire church. These conciliar considerations on the evangelization and incorporation of new members in the mission context give the RCIA its focus. The young churches gave the council a keener sense of the privilege and responsibility to reach out beyond to the world. They brought an appreciation of the centrality of the church's mission to its life and vitality. Their pastoral struggles with the challenges of evangelization and formation sparked a renewed sense of mission and community in the church.

Responsibility for the formation of new members in each local church rests on the bishop, according to the *Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church* (CD). He is to re-establish or adapt the instruction of catechumens and to see to it that catechetical training makes "faith become living, conscious and active." Bishops are also urged to train catechists in the theological, psychological and educational aspects of their ministry (CD 14). The pastoral task of fostering faith development outlined in this article is crucial to the quality of commitment, not only of new members, but of all adult members of the church.

Finally, the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (PO) reminds priests of their twofold responsibility to God's people: personal and corporate. On the personal level, as "educators in the faith," they must lead Christians to grow in their gospel vocation, to charity in their activities and to increasing freedom in the Spirit, i.e. to Christian maturity. On the corporate level, they work to form

Christian community within the local church and to create a sense of corporate relationship and responsibility toward the church universal and the world (PO 6). This outgoing spirit directly reflects the ecclesiology of the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.* Significantly, this article does not treat the education of catechumens and the newly baptized in a Christian way of life as a primary pastoral responsibility of priests. It belongs to the local community as a whole.

It was only natural that a church that began by describing itself as mystery, sacrament and community should finally decide to reinstate the catechumenal process. Vatican II issued that mandate to the world's young churches, outlining for them the method by which the early church centuries before had incorporated new members. The council also clearly designated those responsible for overseeing the process of initiation.

Since Vatican II the church's self-understanding has deepened. If the church is always and everywhere mystery, sacrament and community, all new members wherever they may be must be initiated into its mysteries and incorporated step by step into the local community of believers. As those responsible for the reform of the baptism rite approached their task, they found themselves with the mission of developing a rite that respected both the newcomer's journey to faith and the nature of the welcoming church.

Differentiation of roles, interdependence, responsibility of all members for the church's growth and vitality: these concepts from the Vatican II documents were synthesized, integrated and developed in the introduction to the RCIA. The rite is not simply a ritual reform, but the reflection of a broad theological outlook. In it the catechumenate is a spiritual journey through conversion to faith. Ecclesially, the rite expresses the church's birth and growth.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The RCIA is the last liturgical reform mandated by Vatican II. Why was it so long in preparation, especially since so much groundwork preceded the council? The initiation process and its rites had to be tested in actual pastoral situations and evaluated before finalizing the RCIA. This was done at various levels in different places throughout the world. In France, for example, where catechumenates had been functioning in a number of dioceses since the '50s, several post-Vatican II gatherings on the subject were convened. Each grappled with different aspects of the catechumenal process.

The Peyrius study session (1967) emphasized that "entrance into the catechumenate presumed certain requirements not only on the part of the catechumen, but also on the part of the ecclesial community."[11] This concern is mirrored in nos. 7a and 12 of the RCIA introduction. Two years later the National Days of the Catechumenate were held in Paris. This time with newly baptized persons present as participants the French church struggled with the difficulties of the "catechumenate community." The following year the meeting of the French bishops emphasized the catechumenal nature of the newly evolving basic Christian communities with their focus on the deepening of the faith of the members of the local church.

These ecclesial dialogues based on the experiences of numerous local communities greatly enriched present catechumenal structures. The RCIA is the product of serious theological-pastoral reflection and maturation.

Perhaps this may be a clue to resolving current pastoral difficulties in the U.S. as to the understanding, practicality, and even desirability of the RCIA in today's church. In large measure we have been handed the product without the process.

Historically, the American church has separated theology and pastoral practice almost to the point of spiritual schizophrenia. The church in this country has tended to regard theology mainly as an academic discipline, interesting but impractical, remote in its relationship to pastoral ministry. This cleavage impoverishes the quality of both theological reflection and pastoral practice. The former is relegated to seminaries and universities, while the latter concerns itself with the practical business of running the church.

The pastoral theology in the RCIA might well prove to be a major step toward bridging this gap. In its preparation two streams merged: the reconstruction of the catechumenate rites used by the early church and the experience of contemporary catechumenal centers. There was much concern that the catechumenal liturgy mirror both sound liturgical knowledge and creativity along with solid pastoral experience.

What then is the fruit of all this labor? To what extent was the effort successful? In Aubry's opinion, "Our Ordo is the fruit of the best pre-conciliar theological-pastoral labour; it desires to present a renewed rite and to define the very process by which faith is

[11] Aubry, p. 18.

attained; it takes care to make a synthesis of what was taught by the whole Council; it was both questioned and revitalized by pastoral practices issuing from conciliar reforms. Thus the Ordo gathers together the best of contemporary pastoral experience."[12]

Aidan Kavanagh judges it "the most mature piece of liturgical reform, the most profound theological statement on the church and surely the most explosive pastoral document to have issued since the council. It is nothing if not a revolutionary manifesto calling for the qualitative renewal of Christian life."[13]

The *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*[14] was promulgated by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1972. It consists of an introduction and six chapters: the rite of the catechumenate received in stages; the simple rite of adult initiation; the short rite of adult initiation in proximate danger of death or at the point of death; preparing uncatechized adults for confirmation and the eucharist; the rite of initiation for children of catechetical age; and, finally, various texts for use in the celebration of adult initiation.

At first sight the variety of rites is overwhelming. A closer look indicates that the first of these rites, the rite of the catechumenate received in stages, is normative. The others cover particular pastoral needs either of groups or of individual persons. I will limit my analysis, therefore, to the first rite.

The process of adult initiation is divided into four stages: the precatechumenate, the catechumenate proper, the period of enlightenment and purficiation, and the mystagogical period or period of post-baptismal catechesis.

The precatechumenate is a period of inquiry, a time for the candidate to establish communication with the Christian community, and the beginning of the evangelization process on the part of the church. It is a time of getting to know the faith and the faithful on a somewhat informal basis. This is not to say the precatechumenate is unimportant. During it the seeds of conversion and faith begin to

[12] Ibid., p. 19.

[13] Aidan Kavanagh, "Christian Initiation for Those Baptized as Infants," unpublished manuscript (1976), p. 6.

[14] Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1972). The provisional English text, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), was published by the United States Catholic Conference (1974).

take root. It is a time for decision making about membership in the church, a crucial stage in the conversion process.

The catechumenate is a prolonged period of pastoral formation. The catechesis during this stage is not to be confused with nor reduced to instruction. Its purpose is conversion to a new way of life in Christ, gradually assimilated and lived for the rest of one's Christian life. Therefore, catechesis has an experiential aspect. Catechumens are to receive concrete experiences of community, prayer and service along with a knowledge of the mysteries of salvation. Kavanagh refers to the catechumenate as "an ecclesial liturgical structure in which conversion therapy is carried on."[15]

During this time the local church provides instruction through its delegates and shares its prayer (eucharist excepted), its faith and its social gatherings with the catechumens. The faithful also work actively with the catechumens to spread the gospel and build up the church. Significantly, in the post-conciliar church social action forms an integral part of the catechumens' ecclesial formation.

The third stage ordinarily coincides with Lent. This period of purification and enlightenment is principally a pre-baptismal retreat for the catechumens, a time for deepening self-knowledge and knowledge of the Lord. Liturgically, the scrutinies and presentations are celebrated during this stage.[16] The former are intended to focus on what the catechumens still lack so that they may be strengthened and healed. The latter recall and sum up God's wonderful works throughout salvation history thereby leading the catechumens to a more profound and joyful faith. The solidarity between the catechumens and the faithful becomes more marked at this stage. Together they must be converted in order to celebrate paschal reconciliation at Easter.

Finally, the mystagogical stage coincides with the paschal season. The neophytes are now fully incorporated into the church. The expectation is that together with the faithful they will continue to progress in meditation and service, as well as in closer community ties celebrated in eucharist. It is a time for remembering and deepening the landmark experience of Easter initiation.

Clearly, the stages of initiation are not just legal requirements to

[15] Aidan Kavanagh, "Christian Initiation of Adults: The Rites," *Worship* 48:6 (June-July 1974): 320.

[16] The ordinary time for the presentations is Lent, but they may be celebrated as developments of the catechesis on prayer during the catechumenate; see RCIA, nos. 125, 184.

fulfill to receive baptism. Rather, they represent levels of faith. Initiation is a progression, "a dynamic reality which supposes progress on the part of the candidate, but which equally requires a process of reception on the part of the Christian community; this community by its warm presence and radiating manner is the best instructor for conversion. There can be no catechumenate without a community."[17]

The transitions between these four stages are marked by appropriate liturgical rites intended to celebrate what occurred in the previous stage and to mandate and strengthen the catechumens for the stage ahead. They include the rite of admission, the rite of election and the sacraments of initiation. Each is celebrated at a moment of decision, a turning point in the relationship between the candidate and the church.

The first of these celebrations is the rite of admission. As its title indicates, the rite is celebrated when the candidate has decided to ask for membership as a catechumen so that he/she may be prepared to live a Christian way of life. For its part, the church, having witnessed the sincerity of the candidate's conversion in the pre-catechumenal stage, gladly welcomes him/her into the community.

After a prolonged catechumenal period, when the catechumen has decided to request baptism of the church and the church for its part has judged the catechumen's faith sufficiently mature, the rite of election is celebrated. The names of those chosen are recorded in a register. The church formally inscribes them among the elect and calls them to the Easter sacraments. The local church along with the catechumens pledges itself to repentance, prayer and works of charity during Lent.

The process reaches its climax in the celebration of the Easter vigil. The elect, having died and risen with the Lord in baptism and been sealed with his Spirit in confirmation, are admitted to full membership in God's people. Fully incorporated into the community, they celebrate their new life in the eucharist for the first time. The renewed association of the sacraments of initiation with the Easter vigil focuses attention on this event's salvific content. As the vigil unfolds, the church surveys all of salvation history, situating itself in the "full sweep of God's purpose . . . revealed long before the Incarnation occurred."[18]

[17] Aubry, p. 21.
[18] Kavanagh, "Christian Initiation of Adults: The Rites," p. 325.

This salvific process begun in creation, covenanted in the exodus, continued through the prophets, climaxed in the Lord's death-resurrection. However, it is more than simply recorded, past history. The work of salvation continues in the world, in the church, and in a special way, in the incorporation of new members into the community of believers through the sacraments of initiation. This Easter context broadens the community's understanding, partaking and celebration of the Christ event and of its own incorporation into Christ. The church joyfully receives the initiates who are "not only . . . dying and rising in Christ as the church commemorates his passage from death to life long ago: more importantly, the initiates are entering into his corporate real presence in the universe, the church, where his passage from death and 'this world' to life unabounded remains an ongoing reality that is the pivot on which the renewed cosmos turns. Only the Easter vigil yields up an ecclesiology that is worthy of baptism."[19]

It is one thing to outline a rite marking its stages and noting its rites of passage, and another to penetrate its intent and significance. The RCIA reflects changes in the meaning of Christian initiation, in the theological understanding and pastoral practice of baptism and confirmation and in the nature of norms in an ecclesial document.

The RCIA represents a revolution in the meaning of initiation. Because a group's initiation process gives shape and orientation to its membership, the rite has effectively reshaped what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a church. The process of initiation, taken seriously, provides a structure for the renewal of Christian community life. Continual conversion, regular interaction with catechumens on a social, worshipping and witnessing basis cannot fail to reform the attitudes of the faithful toward their identity as Christians in a communal context. Community, faith, relationship to God and to others are basic to church. Where they are realities, not merely assumptions, we are in fact dealing with a new experience of church. With this dramatic shift in focus, the norm of pastoral care is no longer "the effective preservation of a faith already assumed to be present, nurtured mainly outside the formal structure of the liturgy, (but) the radical transformation of life and values that is publicly celebrated as a corporate responsibility."[20]

Another shift, at least in popular theology, is that initiation does

[19] Ibid., p. 325.

[20] Ralph A. Keifer, "Christian Initiation: The State of the Question," *Worship* 48:7 (September 1974): 393.

not begin with baptism. Baptism does not even bring about entrance into the church, because catechumens are already members of an ecclesial order. Rather, the sacraments of initiation bring the entire process to its liturgical climax.

The shift in theological viewpoints on baptism is even more dramatic. The theology that developed around the practice of infant baptism emphasized original sin: forgiveness of inherited guilt, washing away of inherited stain. The celebration of baptism depended on the date of birth, not on the liturgical cycle. Moreover, the communal dimension of both baptism and the subsequent religious development was ignored. The RCIA changes this perspective. It never mentions original sin. Rather, it emphasizes conversion in Christ, commitment to a new way of life in Christ celebrated in conjunction with the liturgical commemoration of his death-resurrection in the midst of the community.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this shift. Guzie sums it up: "The Adult Rite is truly revolutionary, in the full sense of the word. It 'turns us back' to a more authentic tradition regarding the meaning of initiation. But, in doing so, the rite runs counter to the theology of baptism and the theology of original sin that has in fact supported pastoral practice for some fifteen hundred years. This, to put it mildly, is challenging."[21]

Perhaps the most important liturgical change is the placing of confirmation immediately after baptism in the same liturgical event. Theologically, the rite reestablishes the connection between the Son's mission and the outpouring of the Spirit, between baptism and sealing with the Spirit, thereby signaling the unity of the paschal mystery. Pastorally, it reverses the longstanding practice in the Western church of reserving confirmation to bishops. Priests may confirm the newly baptized. Ordinarily, the priest celebrant or a priest who has guided the catechumen through the conversion will assume this role.

Another characteristic that deserves comment is the flexibility of norms. They are open to adaptation to local cultures. Numerous adaptations are left to the episcopal conferences.[22] Aside from the obvious decentralization and the movement away from strict liturgical uniformity, encouragement of adaptations represents a conscious effort to foster the growth of truly indigenous churches.

[21] Tad Guzie, S.J., "The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: a Rite for Adults Only?", *Christian and Parish Rebirth and Renewal*, p. 6.

[22] RCIA, art. 64, p. 13.

The document considers local churches as communities of believers rather than as hierarchical structures. Moreover, ministries are viewed as facets of the church's mission, belonging essentially to the community of the faithful. This outlook augurs a radically revised view of ministries in the church whose effects will be far reaching. In terms of liturgical ministry, the rite is revolutionary. Lay people may celebrate services of the word during the catechumenate, minor exorcisms and blessings during the period of enlightenment.

The RCIA truly provides a structure for "renewal of Christian life in common." In redefining what it means to be a Christian in terms of conversion of life and faith in the Lord developing into a commitment to walk in his way as members of his church, the rite also redefines the identity of that church local and universal.

3

Vision

A new rite, a new church

In discussing the RCIA, Ralph Keifer makes this outrageous statement: "The attempt to reform the rites of initiation has issued in the promulgation of rites which are, historically and culturally speaking, a massive rejection of the presuppositions both of pastoral practice and of most churchgoers regarding the true meaning of church membership. This is a revolution quite without precedent because the Catholic church has never at any time in its history done such violence to its ritual practice as to make its rites so wholly incongruous with its concrete reality. Such an act is either a statement that the rite is totally irrelevant, or a statement that the church is willing to change, and to change radically, that concrete reality. Such an approach is either suicide or prophecy of a very high order."[1]

After the initial shock of Keifer's statement, we quickly remember the RCIA is hardly a document produced by radical church leadership to jolt the consciousness of lethargic church membership. The rite grew from creative pastoral practice, historical research and prolonged theological reflection that led the church to rediscover its tradition. The church recognized itself in the mirror of the early Christian community. Once again it was striving to carry out its mission in a pre-Christian milieu in the young churches of the third world and in a dechristianized milieu in countries long assumed Christian. I believe the RCIA is a practical vision of what the church must become. The rite is in fact "prophecy of a very high order."

If this is the case, why has there been so little response to the RCIA? Is it because the American church has been given the product

[1] Ralph A. Keifer, "Christian Initiation: The State of the Question," *Made Not Born*, pp. 149-150.

without the process? Or are the rites so rooted in history as to be antiquarian? Or is the process too complex and time consuming?

Any of these reasons could be true, but I think the answer lies deeper, in the collective unconscious of contemporary Catholics, clergy and laity alike. Keifer touches it when he mentions "the presuppositions both of pastoral practice and of most churchgoers." These presuppositions are in the area of ecclesiology.

In the last chapter I described the shift in the theology of the church as a shift from a structural to a relational model. This shift may appear somewhat abstract. In fact it implies a change in the underlying principles on which the church operated before Vatican II and on which both the ecclesial body and many individual Catholics continue to operate. Worgul calls these principles "one's starting point." He says, "A starting point should not be envisioned as a 'first step' nor as a vague conceptualization of a vision or goal. Rather a starting point is understood here as an unconscious pre-supposition, submerged model, or groundpoint."[2]

As we turn to the RCIA theology of the church, we must take into account the starting points of the theology of the church over the centuries before the council, since they are present and operative in people. Against them all change is measured. Because they provide a sense of rootedness and stability, these models or first principles are extremely difficult to alter. Yet that is precisely Vatican II's challenge to the church. The problem is that the preconciliar theology of church is rooted in medieval theology and in the medieval societal model of Christendom. That theology was partially based on some inauthentic "historical" documents and on church experience expressed in rituals contemporary to the medieval period but discontinuous with church experience in the first six centuries. Medieval Christendom was the era in which church and society were one, neither could change and in a sense a person was born into both at the same time. The church as the perfect society was the ideal: a well organized hierarchy to teach, govern and sanctify a receptive and obedient laity. The structure was inextricably bound up with the church's understanding of its mission. In this context it was only natural to speak of the hierarchy as "the church." Conformed to the pattern of the society that produced it, this model of church served well. The ideal of Christendom has long since passed into oblivion;

[2] George S. Worgul, "The Ecclesiology of the 'Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,' " *Louvain Studies*, Fall 1976, p. 160.

however, its attitudes and structures still haunt the church as unconscious models.

The council's prophetic voice called the present generation to the challenge of correcting this focus by studying the whole spectrum of our 2,000 year tradition, to a radical surrender of familiar models and presuppositions based on the experience of medieval culture and to a discovery of how to mediate the religious meaning of the Christ event to the 20th century world. The alternative is obsolescence.

Worgul summarizes the situation boldly: "The church must have the courage to proclaim the gospel, ever new, or face condemnation as a dead institution of the past. This change cannot be superficial. It must reach down to the origins of the church's being, and this implies focusing on how Christians are made. . . . No longer can the church base its initiation process on the first principles of the middle ages envisioning a theocentric world with a perfect leader, the church. To continue this as a presupposition and at the same time to expect contemporary men and women to function and survive as Christians in their present world is absurd, if not condemning them to a schizophrenic existence: medieval in religion, contemporary in society."[3]

The church has attempted to reach back to its origins to renew itself as a more effective instrument of God's Spirit in the world. Moreover, in line with this vision it has revised its initiation process. Now, the local churches must discern what the Spirit has wrought in our midst.

Throughout this discernment, we must remember that, like the old model, the new process of initiation has its groundpoint, its submerged model of church. What is the groundpoint of the RCIA? At first it appears basic and self-evident: the people—not individuals, but the corporate body of believers—are self-consciously and effectively the church. Without this understanding nothing in the rite makes sense.

If the RCIA does in fact present a new and strategic vision of what the church is in process of becoming, and if this vision is neither immediately evident nor identical to the one in which the contemporary church has long been steeped, then a close study of the document's ecclesiology is in order. I will show how the RCIA gives shape to the vision of church from two reference points: (1) a biblical-theological perspective, the manner in which the rite

[3] Ibid., p. 161.

explicitly describes the church universal; and (2) a pastoral perspective, the church as revealed through the role of the local community.

Theological perspective

The RCIA gives form to Vatican II's ecclesiology in which the people of God is the primary biblical-theological image of the church. Both in the rite and in the *Constitution on the Church,* the people of God refers to the whole community of believers. It is an image of the church universal.

What makes this church recognizable as truly a people of God? The conciliar document provides the context: "It has pleased God . . . to make persons holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bond, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth, and serves him in holiness" (LG, no. 9).

It describes the people of God as "those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable, but from an imperishable seed through the Word of the living God (cf. 1 Peter 1:23), not from the flesh, but from water and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5-6) (and who) are finally established as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' " (LG, no. 9).

The church is first of all a corporate entity, a new people who have participated in rebirth through word, water and Spirit and who are thus made holy. To gain an appreciation of this rich vision, we will probe its scriptural evolution and meaning.

A holy people

Only God is holy, the Old Testament proclaims, and his holiness is "terrible" (Exodus 32:20). Holiness describes his awe-inspiring transcendence. Desiring Israel for his own, God made a covenant with this people who by that very fact shared in his holiness. Thus they became a consecrated nation (Exodus 19:6, Deuteronomy 7:6, 26:19), God's sacred possession (Jeremiah 2:3). Holy, sacred, consecrated—an awesome calling that could only come by God's choice. This faithful God promised he would be their God and they his people. As a pledge of their covenant faith, the people were to demonstrate their quasi-familial relationship with God by living according to their new status, by keeping his law. The holiness of this people was then a gift from the God who called them. As their

response, they were to follow the high moral standards God enjoined upon them. While moral living was related to the call of holiness, morality was not holiness.

In the New Testament, after the Spirit's coming at Pentecost, the Lord's disciples came to see themselves as a chosen people, the people of the new covenant with all that implied. They were the "saints" at Jerusalem, Thessolonica, Ephesus. Paul explicitly reminds the church at Corinth of its call to be "the holy people of Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Once again a people were called to covenant with their Lord, a covenant entered into through the waters of baptism which effected their passage from death to life, from sin to holiness. At baptism they were "washed clean and made holy . . . through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:11). The disciple-church treasured this holiness bought at a great price. They knew "Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy"(Ephesians 5:25-27). They were the people of the new covenant in Christ's blood. Now, dedicated to God, they were to emulate his holiness, to be holy as he was holy (1 Peter 1:15).

This is our heritage. The RICA calls the church to remember its corporate holiness. Through our baptismal sharing in Christ's dying and rising we have become God's holy people (RCIA, no. 210). From him we receive life through God's Spirit in whom we become one family (Galatians 4:4-7). This Spirit empowers us to call God, "Abba, Father," because everyone born of the Spirit is God's son or daughter. As the letter to the Romans reminds us, not only are we adopted children, but heirs as well. As coheirs with Christ we must embrace the life and mission he has entrusted to us in the world and share in his sufferings that we might share in his glory (Romans 8:14-30). As our ancestors in the faith saw clearly for their time, we in the present must recognize ourselves as a people, one in the Lord, chosen by him as witness to his saving love, caught up in the embrace of his holiness and expected to live in a manner worthy of our vocation.

We cannot stress too strongly in this age of individualism that we are called as a body, a people. Through the birth of baptism we have been incorporated into the one body of Christ. In it we enter a profoundly new relationship to one another. Aidan Kavanagh describes the bond between believers as "the reciprocal mutuality of relationships we call communion, and it is this communion which constitutes the ecclesial real presence of Jesus Christ in the world of

faith, hope, charity and character."[4] According to Vatican II, that communion is the "sacrament of God's saving presence in the world."

A royal priesthood

The RCIA repeatedly calls the people of God "priestly."[5] In fact from the days of the Sinai covenant, membership among the people of God has been associated with covenant, holiness and priesthood: "From this you know that now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you . . . shall be my very own. . . . I will count you as a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation" (Exodus 19:6).

The covenant that constituted Israel a holy people also made it a "kingdom of priests." What is sacred is naturally related to worship. This priesthood of the faithful was fulfilled in the Israel of God, the church. There the believers were saints who in union with Christ the high priest continually offer God a sacrifice of praise (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6).

Some scholars believe the first letter of Peter to have been a baptismal homily. From internal evidence we can safely say it was written with the new birth of baptism in mind. The text refers to those chosen by God as "the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God" (1 Peter 2:5).

Summing up this rich tradition, the RCIA reminds us that through baptism we have become "members of Christ and of his priestly people" (RCIA, no. 229). Union with the Lord and with his people: these are two conditions for participation in Christian worship.

This priesthood of the faithful is further qualified as "royal." This adjective identifies the Christian community in a special way with Christ, Son of David, Son of God, the Lord who rules eternally. Dynamically one with him, the community is an extension of his person, Christ's body, enspirited with his life, continuing to worship the Father in its life together.[6]

Filled with the joy and boldness that come from the Spirit, the author of 1 Peter sums up this baptismal spirituality in lyric terms: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of

[4] Aidan Kavanagh, "Christian Initiation of Adults: The Rites," p. 333.
[5] cf. RCIA, nos. 19-3, 224, 229.
[6] cf. Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:3; 4:18.

darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, and now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

In the RCIA, an exhortation brings the many strands of meaning associated with this biblical image to focus in the person of Jesus Christ and in the members of his body: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . (has) welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life" (RCIA, no. 224).[7]

This description of the universal church, deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is a direct development of the conciliar theology of the church. The focus rests on the corporate identity of the Christian community in its relationship to the Father through Jesus Christ and to one another in the Spirit.

According to the baptismal spirituality of the RCIA, the church is: a people who share in the Lord's death-resurrection; a holy people, consecrated to God in baptism; the family of God, adopted sons and daughters in Christ; a royal priesthood offering to the Father the worship of the new covenant; members of Christ called to "build up the Body of Christ in faith and in love" (RCIA, no. 229).

Pastoral perspective

While "the people of God" is the primary biblical-theological image of the church in RCIA, "the community of the faithful" is the frequent descriptive definition. It describes the local church, a microcosm of God's people that embodies and gives visible expression to the larger reality.

"The People of God, represented by the local church" (RCIA, no. 41) designates a specific body of believers who in fact are the church in the world. The RCIA presents a dynamic picture of this community engaged in the development of its faith and in actively accompanying others in their journey to faith.

The rite's opening offers a summary of the community's role: "The initiation of catechumens takes place step by step in the midst of the community of the faithful. Together with the catechumens, the faithful reflect upon the value of the paschal mystery, renew their own conversion, and by their example lead the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously" (RCIA, no. 4).

[7] RCIA, no. 224. This rite is used only when for some unusual reason the celebration of baptism is separated from confirmation.

The church is, first of all, a community of persons who share a common faith, not a loose federation of individual believers. The life of these "faith-full" people is centered on the paschal mystery which calls them to deeper stages in their process of conversion and growth in Christ.

How does the community of the faithful provide an ecclesial environment in which faith can truly be nurtured and grow according to the rite?

Ministry of welcome

The community of the faithful is a welcoming community ready to share its faith experience with all who manifest interest. During the precatechumenal period families and communities of Christians facilitate the Spirit's action by meeting with the candidates (RCIA, no. 7a). Where desirable, the community provides gatherings in which the local community receives and welcomes interested inquirers (RCIA no. 10). These contacts are simple but essential because they demonstrate the church's personal interest in the individual seeking the Lord. For the groups of Christians involved in this ministry, the experience of reaching out, sharing their homes, participating in groups and discussing their faith reinforces the sense they are indeed God's church actively engaged in mission.

Ministry of service

The community of the faithful is apostolic. Before any ritual involvement in initiation, the rite calls the community to "always be ready to fulfill its apostolic vocation by giving help to those who need Christ. In the various circumstances of daily life, as in the apostolate, each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith according to his (her) capacity" (RCIA, no. 41).

For the faithful, apostolicity is a quality that permeates life. In this perspective, openness in one's personal life and service towards others are basic stances of the Christian community before its members undertake any specific task. Throughout the catechumenal process the community demonstrates this quality by its witness and its works. The church's ministry and mission to spread the good news and to make disciples is the ministry and mission of all baptized Christians.

During the precatechumenate the faithful are called to "remember that the apostolate of the church and all its members is directed first

to making known to the world the message of Christ through their words and deeds and to communicate his grace" (RCIA, no. 41a).

Specifically, to teach as Jesus did, by word and by work, and thus be a channel of grace, is the mission of each member of the community according to his/her specific gifts. Christianity is primordially a way of life. Whatever Christians do individually and corporately shows others what sensitivity and obedience to the Spirit entails.

Once the candidates become members of the church, integral parts of the "household of God," through reception into the catechumenate, the community's corporate role becomes one of mutual sharing. On the one hand, the catechumens' search calls the community to reflect on its faith. On the other, the community's spirit and influence are to permeate every facet of this crucial period in the catechumenal journey. Through the community's example and support the catechumens "learn to pray more easily, to witness to the faith, to be constant in the expectation of Christ in all things, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds and to exercise charity toward neighbors to the point of self-renunciation" (RCIA, no. 14).

These are high expectations. The rite here spells out the ideal community of the faithful. It assumes the community is not only at home in its prayer life, but ready and willing to share it. Moreover, it expects that its habitual witness is of a calibre to bear fruit by facilitating the catechumens' growth in constancy and self-giving. This implies that the faithful are in fact conscious of and actively involved in the apostolate of the church. The catechumens are to be formed to a life of Christian witness by working actively with them to spread the gospel and build up the church (RCIA, no. 19b).

A worshipping community

Because prayer in common with the faithful characterizes the entire process of Christian formation, all the catechumenal rites are naturally celebrated in the context of the worshipping community. In an atmosphere of joyful thanksgiving the assembled faithful pray for and with the candidates during the rites that mark the stages of their grace-filled journey of faith.

When the candidates, who have received initial instruction, made a serious effort at conversion of their lives in Christ, and gathered with groups of Christians (RCIA, no. 15), are ready to publicly declare their intention to become Christians, the local church actively

receives them as catechumens (RCIA, no. 14). It expects the faithful to be "present at the celebration of the catechumenate whenever possible and share actively in the responses, prayer, singing and acclamations" (RCIA, nos. 41, 2). At this time the church, in fulfillment of its apostolic mission, "admits those who intend to become members . . . and . . . expresses their reception and first consecration" (RCIA, no. 14).

Later, at the end of the catechumenate, the community is present at the rite of election to bear witness to the catechumens' readiness for Easter baptism, and joins them in a period of "spiritual recollection," the Lenten season of reflection and retreat (RCIA, no. 152).

The rites during Lent, the scrutinies and the presentations of the Our Father and the Creed also take place in a communal context. During the presentations, the community symbolically hands on to its newest members the treasures that summarize its faith and hope. It unites with the elect in prayer as together they move forward towards paschal reconciliation.

Finally their joint retreat culminates in the celebration of their death and resurrection with Christ at the Easter vigil. During the Easter season "the community and the neophytes (continue to) move forward together, meditating on the gospel, sharing in the eucharist and performing works of charity" (RCIA, no. 37)—in short, allowing the paschal mystery to permeate their lives more and more.

A community in process

The most authentic and touching facet of the ecclesiology of the people of God in the RCIA is the implicit recognition it does not always live as it believes. If it is a holy people, a community of saints, paradoxically, it is also a community of sinners. As such it must be a community whose members are engaged in continuing conversion and renewal. Each year the community is summoned to examine its relationship to the Lord who died and rose for them. They must continue to become God's church through appropriate penance for whatever in them is still not of the Lord. The annual celebration of Lent "renews the community of the faithful . . . and makes them ready to celebrate the paschal mystery" (RCIA, no. 21). In addition to participation in the rites of the elect, the community members work at personal renewal in a spirit of penance, faith and charity in preparation for the renewal of their baptismal commitment at the

Easter vigil. In their common effort the community and the catechumens find mutual support. The Lenten spirit is summed up in the invitation to prayer extended to the community during the rite of election celebrated at Lent's beginning: "Let us pray to the Lord for them (i.e. those chosen for baptism) and for ourselves that we may be strengthened by each other's mutual efforts, and so come to share the joys of Easter" (RCIA, no. 148).

For the faithful, as for the catechumens, the culmination of the Lenten retreat is the Easter vigil, the normative setting for Christian initiation. As the church memorializes Christ's death and resurrection in the context of salvation history, the community renews its contact with the source of its life and mission, renews its own commitment and receives the initiate into the continuing reality of Christ's "corporate real presence in the universe, the church."[8]

In its Easter celebration the church comes to an ever new experience of its identity and mission, its relationship to God in Christ and to the world in which it is planted. Moreover, the neophytes' incorporation into this process not only reflects the church's growth in numbers, but is in itself a development of the community experience (RCIA, no. 39).

Finally, the post-Easter community is a dynamic, growing entity, moving forward with its new members "meditating on the gospel, sharing in the eucharist and performing works of charity" (RCIA, no. 37). Gospel meditation and eucharist root the community ever more deeply in the paschal mystery, the source of its life and its service. The community thus described is engaged in continual growth, striving for conversion, sharing in worship, reaching outward in a service of charity, receptive to the new riches the neophytes, graced by the Spirit, bring to it. With good reason then this eucharistic community comes together to celebrate its life and unity.

A ministerial community

One of the most exciting aspects of the RCIA is its vision of ministry. It calls for "an actualization and acceptance of pluriform ministries and gifts in the local church."[9] Because of its perspective on church, the document provides a context for instituting ministries to meet the needs of the contemporary parish community.[10]

[8] Kavanagh, "Christian Initiation: The Rites," p. 325.

[9] Worgul, p. 162.

[10] Edward K. Braxton, "Adult Initiation and Infant Baptism," *Becoming a Catholic Christian*, p. 168.

Although the ministries mentioned specifically in the rite pertain directly to the initiatory process, the introduction of this participatory model of ministry will serve as a catalyst to call forth other ministries. These ministries will enable the community to implement its vision of itself as a "church-in-the-making."

With regard to forming new members, the rite acknowledges the need for various ministers, a kind of team ministry to accompany candidates in the long journey through conversion to a mature faith. Who are these ministers? What are their roles? The RCIA states that along with the adult catechumen him/herself, responsibility for Christian formation is shared by sponsors, godparents, catechists, the parish community, deacons, priests, and finally the bishop. We have already studied the community's role. Now we turn to the other ministries involved in the catechumenal process.

Catechists play a vital role in the catechumens' progress and the community's growth. Their role is an integrating one, and their instruction is contextual, interweaving the liturgical year, teaching, reflection and prayer with liturgical symbols and local customs. Whether clergy or lay, catechists may be delegated to perform minor exorcisms and blessings. Because their role is key in the formative process, their active participation is urged in all the liturgical rites of the catechumenal process (RCIA, no. 48).

According to the rite, the sponsor is one who "knows the candidate, helps him, and witnesses to his morals." The sponsor is to accompany the inquirer when he/she requests to become a catechumen (RCIA, no. 42). The rite also provides for godparents who perform a distinct ecclesial ministry. They are persons, close to the candidate, who officially represent the local church. The godparent's role which officially begins with the rite of election is one of witness and guide. He or she is "to show the catechumen in a friendly way the place of the gospel in his own life and in society, to help him in doubts and anxieties, to give public testimony for him, and to watch over the progress of his baptismal life" (RCIA, no. 43).

Liturgically, the godparent gives official testimony about the catechumen's readiness for baptism at the rite of election and accompanies him/her in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

The ministries of sponsor and godparent overlap. As a matter of fact, the same person may fill both roles. In practice where both roles

are retained, there seems to be a tendency to reverse them. In the rite, the godparent is a public person appointed by the church; culturally, that is difficult to implement. The purpose is better accomplished by instituting a new ministry of ecclesial sponsorship and instructing in the role persons appointed by the local church. This point is crucial, since the ministry of the godparent-sponsor involves effective personal support of the catechumen through the stages of withdrawal, doubt, anxiety that might rise during his/her journey of faith. Where the catechumenal structure has been implemented, the sponsors' choice and training have been a key to success.

A brief reflection on the early stages of the development of this ministry in the U.S. might be helpful. Historically in our culture, godparents have been chosen on the basis of family relationship or personal friendship. Active participation in the life of the local church or the godparent's Christian witness have not been considered important criteria. Expectations of the godparent in the Christian formation of the candidate, usually an infant, have been minimal. Today, in the case of infant baptism, the parents' role has been reemphasized through parish preparation programs for parents and the more active role they play in the sacramental celebration. These factors have tended to further reduce the godparents' role.

Because of this situation, the adult rite's implementation here in the U.S. has seen adaptation and/or interchange of the roles of godparent and sponsor. The tendency in many places has been to combine the two roles. An alternative practice has been to include sponsors, chosen by the candidate and priest in dialogue, in the catechumenal process from the beginning along with the godparent. The sponsors' role is clearly delineated. In many cases they are expected to participate in the instructional portion of the program along with the catechumen, to meet periodically with the catechumenate coordinator and/or with the parish priest, to be actively involved in the rites, and to maintain contact with the person after his/her full incorporation into the community through the sacraments of initiation.[11]

This ministry obviously requires a high level of commitment on the sponsor's part. Since this job description is a far cry from our current understanding of the term "godparent," it seems preferable

[11] The diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri has had an excellent response to its sponsor training workshops. After explanations of the RCIA, sponsors are provided with booklets outlining the process and their role vis-a-vis the candidates. Parishes and dioceses beyond Kansas City are currently making use of this booklet.

to use "sponsor" to designate this new ministry. In fact "sponsor" is the title used in all current literature on the subject.

When there is a second person acting as godparent, the role is secondary, more closely allied to the cultural understanding. Initially, the godparent is involved in the presentation of the candidate and he/she continues to participate as a witness during the liturgical rites that mark the stages of the catechumenal journey.

In the RCIA the role of deacons is described in broad terms (RCIA, no. 47). The specific details are left to bishops and local pastors. The coordination of catechumenal ministries is provided by priests responsible for "the pastoral and personal care of the catechumens." They approve the choice of godparents in the local church's name, and guide and support them in their ministry. With the catechist and deacon they form a team to facilitate the catechumens' progress. They have the crucial task of adapting the initiation rites to local customs (an unheard-of prerogative in Roman rites), as well as the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. In a sense, they are the hub around which catechumenal ministries function (RCIA, no. 45).

Finally, the bishop is the catechumenate's ultimate pastor. He is responsible for the appointment and training of catechists and for the formation and admission of catechumens. Where pastoral conditions permit it, he undertakes this responsibility personally; more often he accomplishes it through a delegate (RCIA, no. 44). In the latter case it has proved an ecclesially sensitive, pastorally fruitful practice to schedule meetings with the bishop when possible in the catechumenal journey.

There is an interesting similarity between the roles of the laity in the current rite and in early church practice. Once again the tasks of witness and initial evangelization as well as the ministry of catechesis are envisioned as lay ministries. Adequate fulfillment of these roles in the contemporary church will require serious preparation for potential ministers and for the entire community. The underlying assumption of the RCIA in this regard is a vital ecclesial environment, in which the community can recognize and call forth the Spirit's gifts in its membership; in which those involved in full time ministries within the community share a common vision of church and can work together to achieve it; and, finally, in which presbyters are conscious of their role and capable of coordinating the community ministries and calling its members to unity.

This is the rite's scenario. Now, it is a question of preparation and

action. "This is an ecclesiology of involvement and witness," writes George Worgul, "an ecclesiology which invites and elicits from below and within, rather than from without and above. This is an ecclesiology where theory is wedded with praxis, a community and a church based on . . . comradeship (koinonia)."[12]

The community of the faithful grows in faith and accompanies new members on their journey to incorporation in the Lord's death-resurrection. This community is essentially a local church with a clear sense of its identity and mission. It has the following characteristics. It professes a common, explicit faith in Jesus Christ. Acknowledging its imperfect state, it engages in a continuing conversion. As a body of believers it grows in depth and richness of religious experience. It centers consciously on the paschal mystery, not simply as a historical event, but experienced in the life of the local church. It is sensitive to the Spirit's action. It worships corporately through eucharist and common prayer. It provides Christian witness as Christ's "corporate real presence" in the world. It participates actively in the church's apostolic mission especially in evangelization and works of charity. It practices a spirit of openness and welcome. It is personally and collectively involved in the conversion of new members.

Is this vision truly "prophecy of a very high order" or is it so idealistic as to be suicidal? How can this church come to be? In the real world of today's parish churches, what conditions and attitudes must be changed if believers are to make this vision their own? We considered earlier (see pp. 38-39) submerged models, underlying the preconciliar vision of church, which are still operative in many local churches. Two other points deserve our study: the church's current situation in the American culture and the plight of the faithful in the present situation.

The initiatory process described in the RCIA is geared to form new Christians with a strong sense of identity as church with a corporate mission in the world. It assumes, therefore, a local church in which that sense of identity and mission is effectively present.

One does not have to observe parish life for long to realize there is considerable confusion in identity. It is not reducible to pluriformity, and it is far more than differences in form and expression of church. The confusion harks back to the unconscious starting points discussed earlier (see p. 38). One pervasive influence on modern Catholics deserves special attention. The presumption is we are born

[12] Worgul, p. 165.

into a Christian culture. As we grow and integrate that culture's values we are simultaneously integrating Christian values. That is not the case, of course; but, except for the area of sexual morality, we rarely question whether or not American values are deeply Christian. As a result, most Catholics, at least middle class American Catholics, experience a church very much at home in their culture. The adage, "For God and country," creates no tension in the average Catholic believer.

There is clearly an over-identification between church and culture. In these conditions, it is all the more imperative (and more difficult) for the church to articulate its identity and vocation in the world. She must stand over against the culture or become meaningless. To be "salt and light and leaven," the church must be distinct from any culture: "Neither identified nor identifiable with any culture, . . . the church is a sign community concerned with the transformation of the human person rather than with the conservation of the values of society."[13] We must shift from a "Christendom" to a Christian mentality. That shift will challenge the energies of pastors, liturgists and religious educators for years to come. But it must be accomplished or church renewal will consist only of new wine bursting old skins, or worse, of new labels covering antique realities.

At first sight this shift seems to have occurred. From above, church leaders spoke clearly and authoritatively on the church's identity and mission in the Vatican II documents and in numerous subsequent pronouncements. From below, the church has clearly specified for newcomers through the RCIA what it means to be a Christian in today's world. But what of the people who actually constitute the church, the community of the faithful? Brought up under the old structures, faced with an established Christianity more or less fused with a middle class American culture and value system, many American Catholics have experienced change as confusing, undermining values they hold dear. This creates a situation difficult and, in some instances, impossible to accept. The faithful are caught on the horns of a dilemma. Keifer sums up the reality: "And here is the pastoral rub. The concept of church as a local communion in faith, as vehicle of the experience of the presence of the risen Lord and as eschatological sign exists only in official texts and clerical rhetoric, not as something perceived by the great majority of churchgoers. Our operative model is still that of the established church, a bastion of conservatism, convention and respectability. We

[13] Robert Hovda, "Hope for the Future: A Summary," *Made Not Born*, p. 156.

do not conceive of the church as a dynamic and communal reality, but as a static institution ministering to the needs of individuals. . . . The church is not a 'we' but a 'they' or an 'it.' "[14]

That somewhat harsh evaluation is true and, moreover, understandable. The time is overdue for believers who have experienced and identified with the renewed church to take a long hard look at the pain of other adult Catholics in today's church and to deal with them in a pastorally sensitive manner. Church leaders must plan for a conversion process of communal proportions.

Throughout the American church there is a significant thrust in the area of adult education. While education is an essential ingredient of the renewal process, we must beware of expecting it to deliver what it cannot. Education can and will provide an intellectually informed laity. That is no mean contribution. However, what we need as church is conversion of attitudes. That is primarily an experience of the heart. The dynamics required in initiates for transformation of heart and mind and values are also required in church members: a supportive community in which dialogue, shared prayer, shared beliefs as well as celebration and a sense of common mission can take root. Instruction is not enough. We need a broad catechetical outlook so that all educational endeavors consciously strive to integrate instruction, experience, dialogue and common prayer to encourage the development of persons of mature indeed transformed faith. I think parish adult education and parish ministries should be organized on the catechumenal model. If learning and serving take place in an ecclesial environment of fellowship and mutual promotion of faith, the local church will take on a strong sense of identity and be ready to discover new aspects and implications of its faith life. It will then be "skilled at interpreting the religious content of its continuing life in the world."[15]

Those in parish leadership roles must keep in mind that the purpose of church renewal is the transformation of the Christian community. This can happen only where there is deep transformation of persons. In that context liturgy will become a celebration of the life of a concrete community. A community conscious of its deepest desires and its common striving will naturally express itself in praise, thanksgiving and petition in its corporate worship. Parish councils, staff, liturgy and education

[14] Ralph A. Keifer, "Christian Initiation: The State of the Question," *Worship* 48:7, p. 395.

[15] Nathan Mitchell, "The Adult Catechumenate in an Age of Pluralism," *Liturgy* 22:1 (January 1977): 16.

committees would do well to keep this vision before their eyes in establishing parish goals and priorities.

The vision of the "church-in-the-making" in RCIA is exciting and challenging. There are a few local churches who can claim to have achieved it. In a nation accustomed to instant products in throw-away containers, we only slowly gear ourselves to long-range pastoral planning and commit ourselves to long processes. Yet this is the way that true and lasting growth comes. All the more so because we are dealing not only with individuals, but with the community. Hovda maintains, "It will take some doing and some years before 'church' again means only people—and not just people or individuals with faith, but a common life in common faith. That is, people who share prayer, who share the problems of life, who share the exploration of Jesus' death-resurrection gospel, who share discipline, who share celebration, who share mission, and who, therefore, present a corporate and consensus moral and sign posture to the world."[16]

This church we long for will require the faith and commitment of many to a broad corporate ministry before the vision becomes a reality. The reality is worth the investment, because it is the church we are called to become.

[16] Hovda, p. 160.

4

Implementing

Toward making the vision real

We have arrived at the final stage in our consideration of the vision of church in the RCIA. To discern that vision we returned to the roots of our tradition as church. We then reflected on the contemporary ecclesiology developed by Vatican II and specified by the RCIA. We discovered there the church of the future. Now we turn to the current reality, in order to design realistic strategies for the contemporary church to fulfill the great commission to "teach, make disciples and baptize" through the process of evangelization, catechumenate and sacramental initiation outlined in the RCIA.

In this chapter, we will study four questions: (1) What characterizes the 20th century world in which the church is to "teach, make disciples and baptize" into communion? (2) What are the characteristics of the flesh and blood body of believers called to this mission? (3) What kind of conversion must local churches experience to become the Lord's "corporate real presence" assumed in RCIA? (4) What major points are involved in planning the implementation of a catechumenal model of church?

Our world

The primary description of the world in which we live begins by saying what it is not. The 20th century world is not a churchgoing Christian society marked with a deep respect for church pronouncements on the fundamental questions of peace and justice central to the evening news. The separation of church and state in Western society is almost complete. Let the church "translate the gospel message" or "build the faith community." Meanwhile society

will address the basic questions of morality and humanity's survival without benefit of church influence.

Our era carries a depressingly long list of crises: political oppression, nuclear power, apartheid, urban violence, disintegration of family life, etc. Henri Nouwen describes the contemporary scene as "the dislocated world" populated by "nuclear" men and women who "suffer a kind of paralysis."[1] Faced with incredible global problems, contemporary people feel inadequate to cope with them, and consequently experience hopelessness and frustration. Moral and social boundaries are hopelessly blurred in people and societies not rooted in any theological or ideological system. Loss of perspective, feelings of alienation and powerlessness are the result. Contemporary men and women desperately need the hope that comes from a developing tradition with a vision of the future.

Our church

The church should be offering that hope. Unfortunately, the vision of the world held by Catholic churchgoers is often no different from that of others. Faith for both is an area peripheral to life in the world, to its values, problems, objectives. In other words, faith is weak, lifeless and unevangelical.

In a sense the problem with the world is the church and the church's biggest problem is itself. On a personal level, many adult Catholics are frightened people "firmly fixed on a plateau of faith, afraid to take another step in the direction of growth." But frightened people "afraid to lose something of the past cannot respond to the Spirit so they resist the development of new forms which can express the church's role ever more creatively. Those most in need of change yield most slowly to it."[2]

Corporately, the so-called "renewed" church has been as deficient in some areas as the previous model. It is by and large a "maintenance" church concerned with the building of community, the rediscovery of scripture and the renewal of liturgical rites, the promotion of religious education. Evangelization and mission are not yet effective components of local parish life. Therefore, the church talks to itself, always a narrow and frustrating experience. People outside usually ignore it. Those within, clergy and laity alike, slip away to search for meaning and direction from other quarters. The church needs the evangelical thrust and the witness of the

[1] Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1973), p. 6.
[2] Leo Mahon, unpublished lecture.

catechumenal faith journey as much as the world needs the hope that springs from a witnessing church which is truly a sign community.

The contemporary church now knows a time of individual and corporate passage from death to life. Catholics are experiencing the dying of old forms: institutional overload, authoritarian leadership styles, dogmatic definitions, clear-cut rules. Surrounded by disintegrating, familiar forms, many have not yet convincingly experienced the new. In a community where the paschal mystery is a "near abstraction," this is a terrifying state of affairs. The call each Catholic believer and each local church is experiencing (without necessarily being able to name it) is "as radical, as potentially devastating, as agonizingly difficult as the gospel itself: namely, the reinterpretation of life in the very teeth of death."[3] This is the paschal mystery lived by Jesus; it is his church's vocation. It calls the church to corporate conversion, a radical conversion to a mature faith evidenced by a clear sense of identity and personal commitment, solidarity among the community of believers and involvement in the church's mission in our society. This church cannot remain a paper vision enshrined in official documents. It must become churches, many churches composed of men and women who want "to live the gospel with the real feelings, commitments and situations that constitute their lives."[4] These spirit-filled churches will be effective signs to challenge and invite those among whom its members live and work to faith, hope and service.

The question is "how?", how to create this church? On the one hand, that is a non-question because it is the Lord's work and the Lord's Spirit is alive and active in our midst. On the other hand, from a more incarnational perspective this is precisely the task of a disciple church that sees itself entrusted with continuing the Lord's life and mission in the world.

Our post-conciliar experience tells us we cannot put a new finish on the old ecclesial model with the hope it will be adequate. The veneer will crack and peel; the established model will reappear stronger than ever, leaders become disenchanted, members angry and frustrated at best, disassociated at worst. What local churches need is conversion within and radical involvement without.

[3] Nathan Mitchell, "The Adult Catechumenate in an Age of Pluralism," *Liturgy*, p. 12.
[4] Bourgeois, p. 23.

Church in the process of conversion

How do churches come to experience conversion? They already have all the tools: renewed ecclesiology, fine biblical scholarship, new interest in God's word on the part of many Catholic believers, and renewed liturgical rites. Why has there been so little change? What are the obstacles to corporate conversion? Why would a visionary pastor refer to the problems of implementing a catechumenal model of church as "almost insurmountable"? Once we can name the problems, approaches to their solutions may not be far behind. As a first step toward a strategy of implementation, let us identify the major obstacles to implementation of a catechumenal model of church in American parishes.

Some major areas of concern include:[5]

"First, there are too few pastoral leaders and ministers with the vision, imagination, creativity, courage, living faith, determination and leadership ability necessary to achieve this goal." All of these qualities may not be present in each person engaged in pastoral ministry, but they are needed collectively among the membership of a pastoral team seeking to implement the RCIA.

"Second, we continue to operate under the desperate assumption that all ministry must be presbyteral." Where this assumption exists, priests cannot but be overwhelmed and discouraged by the tremendous demands placed upon them. For their good and the church's good this exclusively presbyteral model of ministry must be revised.

"Third, for the most of us church is not a dynamic and communal reality. That conversion should be a matter of any kind of experience, much less of corporate experience, is not expected and not really desired. As a result . . . there is little to initiate people into and little or nothing to celebrate." Until there is some experience of communal conversion, corporate identity will remain vague and commitment weak. Solidarity in the sense of identity and mission is essential to successful church renewal. In an age where competitiveness and individualism permeate every echelon of American society, it is a mammoth task to achieve genuine

[5] Blaine G. Barr, "How Can a Large Parish Become a Viable Catechumenal Community?" *Becoming a Catholic Christian*, pp. 64-65. Barr uses Keifer's excellent article ("Christian Initiation: The State of the Question," *Made Not Born*, pp. 138-139,) as the basis for his reflections on the obstacles to the organization and preparation of a parish for implementation of the RCIA. The problems referred to in this section are based on these sources.

conversion of the local church so that adult members assume responsibility for its growth, vitality and mission.

"Fourth, we have a massive religious problem on our hands because the paschal mystery is, to most people, a near-abstraction. If we are going to do any real initiating, we are going to have to become comfortable with God-talk, gospel-talk, Jesus-talk and Spirit-talk which is both convinced and convincing . . . (We need) ministers who might be willing to take the kind of risk required to articulate for others one's own experience and understanding of a personal God." Catholic Christians of this type are a rare species. That should not be surprising. The categories Barr mentions have been an integral part of Christian tradition from the beginning; but none of them, from paschal mystery to Spirit-talk, were a part of the early religious education of most adult Catholics. Except for the paschal mystery as a theological concept (rather than a continuing experience in the church) none of these categories was an integral part of the seminary training of most Roman Catholic clergy. The church has simply lost the habit of its early tradition of teaching theology in scriptural, relational, experiential terms. A revolutionary change in approach is requisite.

"Fifth, we have serious structural problems in that, first of all, we are lacking in models of what a viable catechumenal community might be." In the long run, this current problem might well turn out to be an advantage. The field is open for creative leaders to create ecclesial models which meet the needs of the church in contemporary American culture.

These problems are real and must be faced with courage if church renewal is to be effective. Within this rather confusing scene signs of new life and "resurrection" exist and a sense of direction is emerging. Seeds planted in the past have blossomed into a rediscovery of scripture, the liturgical movement, charismatic renewal, myriad styles of small group prayer and meditation, marriage encounter, cursillo, social action groups, catechetical renewal and more. Most of these movements recruit members from all levels of church membership. There are no sharp dividing lines between laity, religious and clergy. Together we are discovering that we, all of us, are the church. All of us are called to holiness (conversion within) and to service (involvement without). The leaven is in the dough. People are putting their gifts to work to build up the community. This is the way it must be.

Local churches must continue to provide their adult members with

opportunities like these. Then, catalyzed by these experiences, they will be ready for a post-baptismal initiation process, a process which is "primarily experiential and only secondarily instructional: a community process, a dialogue, a sharing of prayer, discipline, mission, celebration as well as beliefs, an experience of mutual support and encouragement."[6]

It is not sufficient, however, for individual Catholics however numerous to renew their faith and commitment. It is not even honest for the local church simply to provide the context without encouraging continual spiritual growth and community involvement. The whole church, corporately as well as individually, must experience conversion and a renewed sense of its calling. The alternative is individual Catholics, initially filled with enthusiasm and ready to serve, later frustrated and disenchanted with the church's institutional attitudes. They will find other outlets for their Christianity. This is no idle threat. On one end of the spectrum, many former Catholics have already turned to churches of a more scripturally fundamentalistic orientation. On the other, some have become deeply involved in secular groups wherein the commitment to service and social justice is clear and concrete. The question is: how does a "maintenance" church recapture the evangelical and missionary thrusts so integral to its nature since the time of the apostles?

Implementation of the RCIA provides a key to the problem's solution. As we have seen, we are not dealing with just another rite, but with a master plan founded on the vision of what a Christian and the Christian community called church are all about. Efforts to implement this plan have yielded some basic insights. Two are crucial to success: 1) a conscious vision shared by the leadership of the church or churches involved; 2) effective team ministry.

Shared vision

Pluriformity is necessary to the creative tension that produces growth. Therefore, we must ask if, in today's church where numerous models coexist, we can or should insist on a common model to which local leadership is committed. If so, why?

In community life as well as in personal life, we must recognize where we stand and where we would like to be in order to plan the journey ahead. In order to grow in common, we must discern the church model that best meets the real needs of the local church and

[6] Hovda, p. 153.

create a shared commitment among parish leaders to implement it. If leaders can identify their preferred models and at the same time agree on one that best serves the common good, they can use the strengths of their preferences and also recognize the submerged models working against desired goals.

How can this be done? Avery Dulles' now famous models of the church reveal much about contemporary churches. That data might be of value in the implementation of RCIA. A word of caution is in order: the church is a mystery. No model can completely contain or define it. Models deepen our understanding of the dynamics behind the experience of Christian community called church.

Church as institution

Robert Bellarmine in the 16th century defined the model of church that remained dominant for several centuries. "The one and true church," he wrote, "is the community of men brought together by the profession of the same Christian faith and conjoined in the communion of the same sacraments, under the government of the legitimate pastors and especially the one vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff."[7] This classic definition describes the institutional church entirely in terms of visible realities: community, profession of faith, reception of the sacraments, government by the proper authorities.

This model, exclusive in the Roman Catholic communion from the period of the Counter-Reformation until Vatican II, says the church exists primarily for the eternal salvation of souls. To attain this salvation Catholics accepted tight disciplinary standards in obedience to the clergy. Its structure is both the strength and the weakness of the institutional model. On the one hand, the church must be a structured community if it is to survive. On the other, the structure created by this model fosters a caste system with clear-cut divisions between teachers and learners, sanctifiers and sanctified, governors and subjects. In other words, the institutional model encourages clericalism.

Church as herald

From this stance the church is essentially a "kerygmatic community which holds aloft . . . the wonderful deeds of God in past history particularly his mighty act in Jesus Christ."[8] It is the

[7] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1974), p. 14.
[8] Ibid., p. 72.

gathering of those whom the Lord calls to be his witnesses. The focus of the gathered church is God's word which constitutes the bond of unity between its members. From this perspective, the church's primary task is the proclamation of the word.

In churches where this model is dominant, believers are rooted in the source of revelation, the scriptures, understood as vital to Christian life in the contemporary world. This focus, neglected by the church of the Counter-Reformation period, has been revitalized within the Catholic community in recent years particularly among charismatic and other scripturally based prayer and study groups.

Church as mystical communion

This community centered model stresses the union of believers with one another in the Lord and the "totality of the means by which communion is produced and maintained."[9] Along with an ecumenical openness, this model maintains a balance between community and structure. The laity are the heart of the church; indeed they are the church.

Parishes operating from this perspective tend to be strong in ministries, programs and activities to build community and strengthen prayer life. In the Catholic communion this model developed from the conciliar theology of the people of God.

Church as servant

A prophetic model, the servant church is the body of Christ, the suffering servant, which announces the kingdom's coming not only in word but in work. As Jesus was the man for others, so the church should be the community for others. The church's mission is the transformation of society according to gospel values.

Its keen sense of mission is the strong point of this post-conciliar model. Belonging to the church is not simply a matter of relationship to God, or even of incorporation into the community. While denying neither of these facets of church life, this model emphasizes the church's call to be a leaven in society. Service and active involvement in ministry are essential to the vision of church as servant.

Church as sacrament

"If Christ is the sacrament of God," says Henri duLubac, "the church is the sacrament of Christ, (it) represents him, . . . really

[9] Ibid., p. 45.

makes him present. She not only carries on his work, but is his very continuation."[10]

Because the church is essentially a sign community, the sacramental model highlights not only the spiritual dimensions (the indwelling Spirit and the grace that binds Christ's members to one another) but also the visible aspects that are signs of the Spirit's life (community, prayer and worship). Because the church is an outward sign of inward grace, effective witness is a central concern. Only where true Christian witness is present can the church be a sign of hope to the world.

This model blends the interior aspects of faith and commitment with the visible aspects of community, liturgy and witness. Its strength is its integrative power. Because of its emphasis on interior faith, this model balances the tendency to activism present in the servant model. Firmly grounded on the members' experience, it can heal the rift between life and religious belief. Where it is operative, people gather to reflect on their experiences in the light of faith and to celebrate together life's sacramentality.

What do thse models say about the contemporary church?

First, Dulles' models represent a renewed appreciation of Christian tradition. Each has as its central focus one of the four main points of the description of the early church in the summary statements from the initial chapters of the Acts of the Apostles: *Kerygma, koinonia, liturgia, diakonia* (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16). They rest on solid foundations.

Second, although the established institutional model seemed the only legitimate expression of church 25 years ago, today it no longer has an ecclesial monopoly. In light of renewed ecclesiology with the people of God as its primary focus, the institutional model is clearly inadequate. Structures must be at the service of community, mission and worship—not the other way around.

Third, within the contemporary church the field of catechetics has moved from a basically kerygmatic approach in the early '60s to more community and service-oriented programs. These developments provide a clue to a natural process of growth in other areas of church life, e.g. liturgy and ecclesiology.

Finally, reflection on experience in terms of parish renewal parallels the catechetical experience. Where the starting point is God's word, the need for community emerges (e.g. charismatic

[10] Ibid., p. 58. Henri de Lubac as quoted in Dulles.

groups). Where the bond of God's word is missing, efforts to create community often appear contrived. Word and community are the sources and the support of Christian identity. Unless its members are immersed in these realities, the local church cannot adequately understand and express its mission of service. It can never become a vivid sign community.

I think Dulles' models describe an evolutionary pattern of how people and communities grow to mature faith. From the development, a pattern emerges:

Emphasis on the
WORD
is formative of a
COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS
who experience individually and corporately a call to
SERVICE OF OTHERS
which leads to an understanding that the
church is indeed a sign community, a
SACRAMENT
of God's presence in the world.

If this is true, then by respecting these growth stages, local churches can develop direction in their response to the call to conversion and renewal as well as in the process of initiating new members. Not everyone will begin by a knowledge of God's word. The Spirit blows where he will. However, it does indicate the kinds of experiences of catechesis and community needed. The community context must be evangelization, celebration and service. If any dimension is lacking, the church is less than it is called to be. What I suggest, therefore, is that local churches seriously evaluate the strength of their foundations and draw up a design for building on them.

How can this data help in the implementation of the RCIA? While respecting Dulles' skepticism about a "super-model," I think the RCIA's ecclesiology blends and orchestrates the principal characteristics of the Dulles models. It respects the institutional elements in the church because they are the framework by which it can be a clear and visible sign. It highlights the church's communal aspect, because without community the sign would be unauthentic. Moreover, its vision is founded upon the proclamation of the word and Christian witness without which the church cannot point to Christ as redeemer. Finally, it encourages local church outreach to the world around it so that it may be an effective sign of service.

The vision of the church in the RCIA is an integrative model that describes the Christian community as evangelizer, teacher and missionary. The community celebrates these facets of its being in worship. In carrying out these functions in its daily life the church is a sign community, a sacrament of God's presence in our midst.

Effective team ministry

A second insight from implementing the process of Christian initiation on the parish level is the need for a team approach on the part of pastoral staffs. What I said above about proclamation, teaching, service and liturgy shows that no one person, however gifted, could implement the RCIA singlehandedly. It requires a team of persons with a variety of gifts and talents committed to a common vision of church adapted to a specific local community. Once this team has discerned the local church's progress on its journey of faith, its strengths and weaknesses and the model best suited to its needs, staff members can blend their personal visions with those of others to make the common vision a reality.

Obviously, the goal of team ministry is not achieved once and for all. The team may consist of full time professional people (pastor, associates, directors of religious education, liturgist and secretary) essential in large parishes, or of parishioners trained to accomplish the ministerial roles necessary in smaller communities. In either case, there must be regular meetings to coordinate efforts, support each other and grow in ministry together. Moreover, the pastoral team will learn from reflection on its own growth how to foster a sense of corporate identity and commitment as well as how to deal with the conflicts inherent in growth and development within the larger parish community.

These, then, are the initial steps toward the implementation on the parish level of the vision of the church in the RCIA:

1. A conscious model of church shared by all members of the pastoral staff must be agreed upon. Workshops, like the one developed by Thomas Downs, "A Workshop Design in Ecclesiology," will prove useful in this process.[11] The workshop's purpose is to help people overcome the influence of unconscious models; to challenge the expectation that all change originates from the outside, i.e. from pope, bishop or pastor; and to generate personal responsibility for the local church. In the article, "Discovering Parish Identity," Downs

[11] Thomas Downs, "A Workshop Design in Ecclesiology," *PACE* 5 (Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's College Press, 1974).

describes the process as an eight-hour workshop in which parishioners study Dulles' models of church. After reflection on the models' meaning, they "attempt to arrive at a consensus of which of the models need development in their parish at this time."[12]

2. In their approach to the parish, the pastoral staff must function as a team to communicate their vision of the parish's corporate identity to all its members and to coordinate the endeavors of all parish groups in relation to that vision. The goals of all parish undertakings must flow from the church's call to announce the good news, incorporate new members, grow in conversion and in the experience of the paschal mystery and, finally, to reach out in service.

Once these foundations are in place, the staff can set about communicating the vision and implementing the RCIA in the local church. Pastoral action takes a variety of directions. Organically, it grows from staff to parish council and others involved in leadership roles in the parish, then on to the community at large.

In approaching the "almost insurmountable" task of implementation of the RCIA in a parish community, comprehensive planning is a necessity because communicating the vision is far from a simple task. Many parish plans fail at precisely this point. Quite unconsciously, parish leaders, both clergy and lay, allow the submerged institutional model to surface. Although armed with new plans they still assume the old roles of teachers and governors, but they discover in many cases the people of the parish are no longer willing to be the "taught" and the "governed." Because the people are the church, their commitment to the vision is essential. But parish leaders must be sensitive to the parishioners' experience of church and their level of faith development.

In other words, whatever the vision and the plans, they must be presented in a manner that makes them both intelligible and desirable to people. Explanations from the altar or in print are not sufficient. Also needed is discussion and implementation in parish groups and reflection in parish worship.

Once the vision has been communicated clearly and enthusiastically, specific plans can respect people's need for time to absorb, question, respond and become involved. The leaders'

[12] Thomas Downs, "Discovering Parish Identity," in *The Church As Reflecting Community*, ed. Loretta Girzaitis, (West Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1977) p. 81.

approach and attitudes are vitally important. They are issuing an invitation to conversion, not decreeing a new conformism. Invitations look for a response, for dialogue and participation.

What are the goals to be achieved in the implementation of RCIA (for that matter, in any program of parish renewal, among the community at large)?

First of all, Catholic congregations must be called to conversion. Authentic conversion is not a luxury, but a necessity without which all other signs of renewal are deceptions. To "repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15) is the first step in becoming a Christian of mature faith. Thus preaching the gospel and calling the local community to a corporate conversion are of utmost importance. The obvious place to begin is in the communal celebration of Lent and Easter. Programs must meet parish needs, but well prepared models, such as *Ashes to Easter*[13] or *Major Feasts and Seasons*,[14] can serve as a basis for local adaptation.

Second, the vision must be communicated to all adult members of the community. This may seem self-evident but it is often neglected. In too many abortive or minimally successful efforts since the council, hardworking pastoral staffs have promoted fine programs and carefully renewed liturgical practices without adequately communicating the underlying vision. Adults accustomed to understanding how and why they act in other major areas of life cannot simultaneously be mindless and committed in their participation in church. A clear vision communicated with enthusiasm promotes commitment; a muddied incomplete vision discourages it. Communication must make evident to all that commitment, community, service and celebration are a mature faith's normal expressions.

Third, there must be serious efforts at community building. The sense of relatedness, a corporate sense of identity, is the weakest aspect in many American parishes. We must consciously develop an understanding of the theology of the people of God and of the church as sacrament, foundational to the Vatican II documents. Through the sharing of life and ministries within the community, adult Catholics must understand and experience themselves as the church. Only then will corporate witness and ministries begin to emerge. Only then will Catholics know themselves to be a people

[13] Robert Hovda, *Ashes to Easter* (Washington, D.C.: The Liturgical Conference, 1980).

[14] Gabe Huck, *Major Feasts and Seasons* (Washington, D.C.: The Liturgical Conference, 1975).

responsible for church growth and witness through sharing their gifts in ministry to others.

Community is the environment without which there is no Christian growth and development. Blaine Barr offers a practical model for community building as well as a useful bibliography in an excellent article, "How Can a Large Parish Become a Viable Catechumenal Community?"[15] The title describes the goal: to make a large American parish a catechumenal community. The first step was to recognize the many parish groups which could be involved in becoming communities and then to set about working to form the parish into a Christian community.

Barr describes the objectives of the process in the order in which he and his parish leadership team approached them in the Parish Community of St. Joseph, New Hope, Minnesota: (1) to find out what needs to be changed, in other words, to survey the situation and do a needs assessment; (2) to establish a place where people can come together to hear God's word, celebrate the eucharist and experience community; (3) to communicate to the people the goal, the vision, the dream; (4) to find others to share in the responsibility and in ministry; (5) to develop a structure to foster and facilitate the experience and growth of Christian community; (6) to develop a coordinated total parish ministry.[16]

Fourth, there must be meaningful liturgical experiences. Where environment and celebration are weak, there is no enthusiasm, no sense of ministry, no corporate witness, no experience of corporate conversion and renewal. The vision remains an abstraction and the old adage holds: "What you are shouts so loud, I can't hear what you say." Where liturgies are planned to reflect the community's real life, vision and commitment are renewed on a regular basis, and members strengthened to express in witness and service who they are as Christians. To achieve this goal, liturgical planning cannot remain the exclusive domain of the pastoral staff. Worship committees reflecting the community's many gifts must be developed and guided so that communal celebrations are indeed *leitourgia*, the "work of the people," orchestrated by the president of the assembly.

Fifth, the parish educational ministry must focus on adult education. Where opportunities for learning are based on people's felt needs, the response will be rewarding. A learning environment which provides reflection on personal experience, along with content and

[15] Barr, pp. 63-78.
[16] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

opportunity for sharing, respects the principles of androgogy so important to adult catechesis.

Finally, there is need for outreach in service. The church's mission cannot be reduced to building the parish community from within nor to a verbal proclamation of the gospel. Both are necessary, but neither is sufficient. The good news must be taught as Jesus did in word and in work. To be faithful, the local church must make an impact on its environment. Otherwise, it is doomed to irrelevance at best or to a lingering death at worst.

There are local churches where conversion and effective communication are the foundations for implementation of the RCIA; they expend serious effort on ministries, programs, and activities to promote the quality of community, of worship and of service. These churches are beacons of hope in their communities. The challenge is exciting, but the work may be slow and tiresome. Keifer's reflections on restructuring parish life along catechumenal lines pertain here: "(Parish renewal) will not be something that will be accomplished easily or quickly, but with deep faith in the power of the Spirit, much patience, determination, and lots of hard work it can be done . . . Such drastic revision and innovation represents a departure in pastoral priorities and perspective, a departure so radical that it has been unparalleled since the Middle Ages and well before. The norm of pastoral care becomes the radical transformation of life and values. . . . It assumes that the liturgy will be a manifestation of the real life lived by the church, a life marked by sufficient conversion to be worth celebrating, sufficient conversion and catechesis to perceive that the proclamation of the wonderful works of God is possible because they occur among us, sufficient conversion to ensure that the laity are not mere passive recipients of hierarchical grace, but that ministry is a mirror of the priestly service of the entire people of God."[17]

[17] Keifer, "The State of the Question," pp. 138-139.

5

Doing

The vision at work

In 1974 the Diocese of Pueblo adopted a three-year plan for the implementation of the RCIA. The plan's stages parallel the rite's first three stages: evangelization and conversion; catechumenate and catechesis; sacraments of initiation (sacramental initiation and mystagogia).

Mindful that "we the baptized are not only fit subjects for continual evangelization and catechesis as we continue to participate in the eucharist, but also that we are always part of the new process of teaching the faith to the uninitiated,"[1] the program had two purposes. The obvious goal was that of the rite: a process of preparation and initiation of new Christians into the church community. At the same time, if the rite was to be implemented authentically, it demanded the renewal of the present community.

Focusing initially on the second goal, the offices of Religious Education and Liturgy under the leadership of Fathers John Costanzo and Ron Schmit introduced the three-year plan in the spring of 1974. "Since our concern is the church," they said, "our concern is the Christian initiation of adults; for the RCIA teaches us what it means to be church."[2]

Year of evangelization

In preparation, area coordinators of religious education explored the year's thrust during their meeting in the fall of 1974. They

[1] John Costanzo, "A Diocesan Plan for Implementing the New Rite: C.I.A. in Pueblo," unpublished lecture delivered at the annual meeting of the N.C.D.D. in Boston (1976), p. 7.

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

received background reading for further study. Two months later, the group gathered for a retreat during which they read, reflected, shared and prayed together. The stage was set for the coming year's programs. Parish preparation began in the spring through a diocesan newsletter.

The year's major programs were two catechetical weeks in fall and winter, and an education-liturgy congress on evangelization.

The aim of the catechetical weeks was to provide opportunities for the spiritual and theological growth of the volunteer catechists. Area workshops were held throughout the diocese. The first week, held in September, consisted of four sessions. The topics were linked to evangelization, and the process was designed to be repeated on the parish level. The topics included: faith as a personal relationship (Monday), history of catechesis (Tuesday), scripture (Wednesday), and liturgical expression (Thursday).

The second week was a follow-up held in January. The first day was set aside for recollection in response to requests made in the evaluations of the first week. The other two days were devoted to scriptural themes and their practical application in religion classes and discussion groups.

The congress on evangelization, held in October, 1975, was a collaborative effort of the diocesan departments of education, liturgy and ministries. Its aim was to gather as many people as possible from the diocese into a community of study and celebration. The topics reflected the theme of evangelization bearing in mind the rich heritage of hispanic culture in the southwest.

Our objectives were to develop among all Catholics in our diocese an understanding of what evangelization means in our Catholic tradition, and to acquaint the clergy, laity and religious with the *process* of evangelization as it related to their religious education programs. We wanted to recall the relationship of evangelization to the topics of the diocesan three year plan and to see what church membership means and where it begins: evangelization, catechumenate, initiation. We planned to celebrate in liturgy the event of conversion and the salvation that is ours as the faithful people of God, as well as the invitation to grow and call others to growth in the Christ life. Finally, we provided resources and services as requested for effectively communicating the gospel message on the parish level (i.e., sermons, liturgies, discussion guides, lesson plans, etc.).

As a follow-up, the staff of the Catholic Education office prepared an Evangelization Ideas Packet. It offered suggestions for the use of

scripture on all levels of religious education and provided resource lists, evaluations of materials and suggested approaches.

The questionnaire on biblical programs published by the USCC Department of Adult Education was the basic tool used to assess the impact of the diocesan year of evangelization. A brief questionnaire on diocesan programs replaced the original survey's third page. A number of strengths and weaknesses emerged. Perhaps the most significant strength was the increased use of scripture by catechists in almost all parishes.

Year of catechesis

During the spring of 1976, Pueblo Bishop Charles Buswell appointed a Commission on the Christian Initiation of Adults. Members committed themselves to serious study of the document and selected background materials as a first step towards deciding what the diocese needed to do in the process of implementation of the RCIA. The commission was to develop long range goals for implementation that could be translated into diocesan and parish structures. It would then determine the intermediate steps to achieve these goals.

During the fall of 1976, all deaneries received a packet that included a 15-minute tape presentation on the Christian initiation of adults and an update on the diocesan plan for its implementation. Articles were provided for distribution and discussion at deanery meetings.

The plan for 1976-77 centered on Lent 1977, the focal experience of the catechumenate year. The Education Office and the Diocesan Liturgical Commission worked with the newly formed CIA group to prepare a diocesan Lenten program emphasizing conversion and commitment.

The 1977 parish Lenten program for rebirth and renewal was entitled, "Come Back to Me." Its aim was to focus the attention of all local churches on the great Lenten themes of personal conversion of heart, call and response, forgiveness, and membership in Christ and participation in the paschal mystery.

We prepared materials to promote evangelization and catechesis of the church community for use during Lent 1977. We scheduled a series of workshops throughout the diocese in early January for those in catechetical and other parish ministries to familiarize them with the packet of materials and to demonstrate their use.

The packet, also entitled "Come Back to Me," included: homily hints, parish bulletin inserts for family activities and paraliturgies

during Lent, outlines for adult days (or evenings) of renewal, suggested activities for the spiritual preparation of parish staffs, a program of weekly faith renewal sessions for adults and another for teenagers, finally, mini-celebrations for children (grades 1-6), and a list of resource materials.

Instead of a formal evaluation, there was a spot check of parishes throughout the diocese. Approximately 1/3 of the parishes chose to use the program and their response was enthusiastic.

Year of the sacraments of initiation

During the fall of 1977, all paths led to the Southwest Liturgical Conference to be held in January, 1978, with the theme, "Passage Into Life." The format was to be that of a catechumenate with hospitality as a conference hallmark. Participants from southern Colorado, representing the local church, welcomed the newcomers from the 19 dioceses of the Southwest as "catechumens" and accompanied them on their journey. The major talks were delivered in homiletic style within the actual celebration of the initiation rites. To complete the overview of the catechumenal process, two parallel sets of workshops were offered, the first geared for those fulfilling the new ministry of sponsors, the second for general participation. Since the thrust was liturgical, the effort was spearheaded by the Diocesan Liturgical Commission coordinated by Fathers Ron Schmit and Jesse Perez, and Sister Joan Hentges and myself.

The conference aim was to provide an opportunity for those gathered from the dioceses of the Southwest to experience the process and the rites of Christian initiation and to deepen their understanding of its four stages: evangelization, catechumenate, sacraments of initiation and mystagogia.

Our objectives were to organize the people of the Pueblo diocese to exercise a true ministry of hospitality for the participants from other dioceses of the Southwest, and to create a dynamic relationship between the welcoming church of Pueblo and the participants who assumed the role of "catechumens." We wanted to develop by means of an experiential approach an understanding of the various stages of the catechumenal journey, and to adapt and celebrate the rites of initiation highlighting the power of the liturgical symbols. We related the post-sacramental phase of the journey to a sense of Christian mission to the needs of the broader community in the Southwest, especially those of minority status: Mexican-Americans, Indians and

women. Finally, we involved lay ministers in all roles appropriate to them in the actual celebration of the rites.

The event's success exceeded all expectations. On a scale of one to ten, Southwest Liturgical Conference board members rated it an enthusiastic ten. Reporters from the *Pueblo Chieftain* and *Star Journal* assigned to the event expanded their coverage into a series of articles on Christian initiation which appeared on a weekly basis for three weeks after the conference. Most rewarding of all, according to the participants' evaluations, the conference highpoint was the celebration of the rites; hospitality rated second, followed by the presentation of one or another of the speakers.

The diocese is now in the fourth year of its three year plan! Originally, the goal of the Christian Initiation Commission was a policy book to appear at the end of the three year plan so that parishes might proceed to the rite's implementation. As the work evolved, this goal became clearly unrealistic. The commission continues to study and publish its findings. Its revised goal is the publication of a book of guidelines for implementation of the RCIA by 1982. In October, 1978, the commission piloted an information and implementation session on the RCIA in the Pueblo deanery. Fourteen of the deanery's 21 parish staffs were represented. It is too soon to tell how many of those parishes are ready to implement the rite either individually or in clusters, but their awareness of its importance and their interest are the fruit of the labors of all those involved in the design and implementation of the three year plan.

Sacred Heart parish, Alamosa, Colorado, has just begun its third year of catechumenal involvement. The parish includes the city of Alamosa (population 9,000) as well as the surrounding rural county. Demographically, 65% of the parishioners are Mexican-Americans. Given the large area included in the parish, subdivision was an evident need. Under the leadership of the previous pastor, Father Del Blong, the parish adopted the Visitors for Christ plan which involved a substantial number of parishioners in visiting, information gathering and census taking. After the results were studied, the parish was divided into 20 regions within which the formation of small Christian communities (*comunidades de base*) was started. According to the vision, each community was to realize on a local level what is essential to the church on all levels: community, prayer, study and service.

In 1976, the present pastor, Father John Costanzo, introduced the

catechumenate at Sacred Heart. It began with an inquiry class at the completion of which the five persons who persevered were questioned both individually and as a group about their desire to become church members. They were then received into the catechumenate which extended over a period of 18 months.

Outreach on the part of the parish and its approach to the initial period of inquiry has developed each year. In 1976 pulpit and bulletin announcements were the only means used to gather inquirers. Since that time additional contacts with persons interested in the church have been made through home visits by parish staff, initiative on the part of inquirers who had heard of the parish program, and recommendations of interested friends by parishioners. The following table shows the growth in numbers and the change in group composition:

	non-baptized	*baptized in other communions*
1976	1	4
1977	7	4
1978	4	8

Since the inquiry stage was designed for anyone who wished to understand the church better, participants' motives ranged from simple curiosity to an already clearly formulated desire to become a member of the Catholic community. For the first group (1976), this inquiry period consisted primarily in a series of ten classes. A more comprehensive approach has since developed. At the present time greater emphasis is placed on discussion of the presentation by the inquirers and involvement of parish members as witnesses to the meaning of themes such as prayer, scripture, community, etc. in their lives.

For the 1978 group of inquirers, the formal program began in October and lasted ten weeks. Those participants who wished to seek admission to the church were interviewed by a member of the parish staff who assisted the candidate in the process of decision-making and in the choice of a sponsor. Enrollment into the catechumenate took place at the beginning of Lent 1979.

During the following year the catechumens and their sponsors participated in weekly sessions led by a member of the parish team. Headed by Father Costanzo, the team included the director of religious education, the associate pastor, the director of Visitors for Christ, the director of liturgy, and the youth minister. The program

continued until Lent 1980 at which time the catechumens, surrounded by their sponsors and the parish community, began their immediate preparation for the sacraments of initiation with the celebration of the rite of election.

In organizing the program for the catechumenal stage, the team has blended experience with instruction. Each month explored a basic theme from a variety of perspectives. Themes included: God's word, covenant, election and anointing, Christian witness, creation, sin and evil, Jesus Christ, Christian community, living faith, and church as the living witness to Jesus Christ. Humitz's *Man Meets God,* the basic resource, was supplemented by Ryan's *The Jesus People,* Wilhelm's *Christ Among Us,* O'Donnell and White's *Renewal of Faith,* and selected audiovisual materials. After a scriptural presentation the first week, the following session touched upon doctrinal developments. The third week was devoted to witness by individuals or groups from the community who shared their experiences of conversion, the word, covenant, etc. in their lives. Finally, during the fourth session sponsors worked with their respective catechumens on some practical aspects of life as a Catholic.

During the period of enlightenment the elect and their sponsors reflected prayerfully on the themes of the catechumenal period in order to experience them more deeply. Focus on personal faith and commitment to Jesus Christ in the church constituted the final phase of preparation for the Easter vigil.

The Easter vigil celebration has become a joyful and dynamic experience of new life at Sacred Heart. As the gathered community remembers all that the Lord has done for it through the great moments of salvation history, it experiences another great moment: the passage from death to life of its newest members. Not only the elect but all involved in their journey joyfully anticipate the celebration. After the vigil, the parish continues its celebration at a welcome party for its now fully incorporated members.

Three post-Easter sessions were held. The first was a very gratifying experience of listening while the newly baptized shared with each other, their sponsors and the parish staff what the Easter vigil experience was for them. A second session focused on reconciliation and healing. Finally, the session on service led each new member to a commitment to a specific ministry in the parish.

Every program needs evaluation and improvement. The current program at Sacred Heart has demonstrated a number of strengths:

Incorporation of catechumens into sponsor groups has proved beneficial to both. The group, be it small Christian community, prayer group or choir, besides providing a concrete experience of Christian community, is also a source of support and witness to the catechumen. On the other hand, journeying with the newcomer calls the group to reflect on the quality of its faith and commitment.

The variety of ministries among the team demonstrates that all community members are called to use their talents in service.

The presence of a full time liturgist on the staff insures the blending of celebration with catechesis throughout the catechumenal journey.

The vision shared by each parish group on its contribution to the four major ministries of the parish (community building, catechesis, service and celebration) assures unity and continuity between the catechumenate experience and the experience of the parish community.

Finally, the commitment to service provides channels of expression for the faith of new believers and a challenge to the community at large.

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